PHOTOGRAPHY &
THE AMERICAN ROAD TRIP

The OPEN ROAD

DAVID CAMPANY

aperture

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I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine,
and the north and the south are mine.

I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.

All seems beautiful to me . . .

— *Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road"*

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A Short History of the

LONG ROAD

David Campany

Joy rides, voyages of discovery, surveys, wanderings, migrations, polemics, travel diaries, and assessments of the nation. Is America imaginable without the road trip? Without everything the road trip implies: the cars, the buses, the motels, hotels, campsites, diners, and gas stations? Is it imaginable without the camera that records, expresses, and promotes such journeys? When the American photographer Stephen Shore declared that, "Our country is made for long trips,"[1] was he being obvious, merely noting that in a place of such size, epic travel is inevitable, or was it something more profound? America's newcomers had made long trips to get here. They had the appetite and the experience of distance. More important, might we not say that as a nation formed at the onset of an industrial revolution, perhaps even the concept of modern America presumes the need for long trips? The means of travel may come and go, but the impulse is constant.

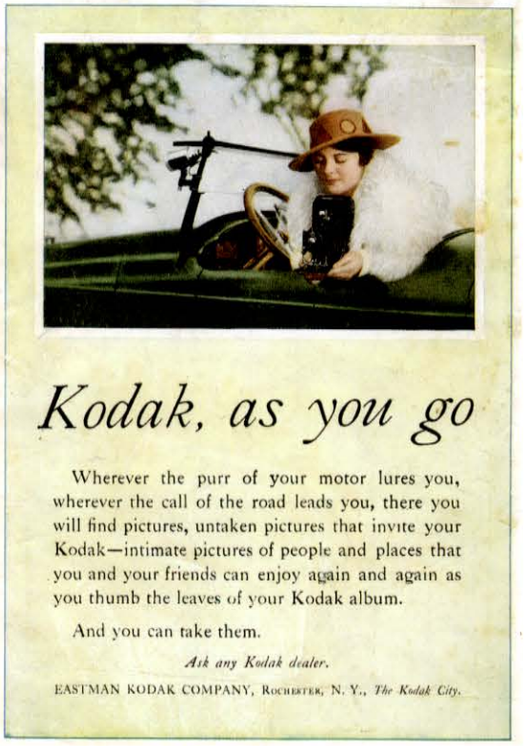
Whatever the truth of these questions, when photography arrived in the 1830s it was into a world of expansion and exploration, a world in which space was not just to be conquered and mastered but contemplated and incorporated as an imaginative resource. The long trip would always be as poetic as it was practical. *The Open Road* is a survey of photographers on the move across America and across the last century. Many of us think of the road trip as starting fully formed with Robert Frank and his landmark photographic book *The Americans* (1958/9). This essay explores the cultural context leading up to that moment and is followed by a series of portfolios that show the various directions taken by photographers and artists after Frank. Setting out by car for a few weeks, a few months, or even indefinitely, they have produced chronicles of experience and change.

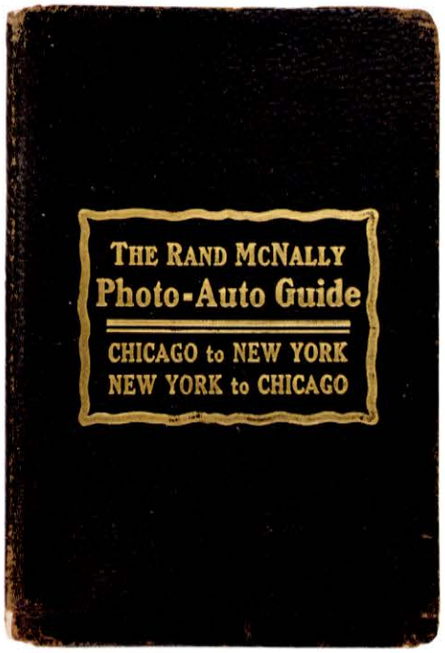
As soon as it was possible to cross the country by automobile, such journeys became if not a final frontier then at least a marker, a way to feel the expanse of the continent and achieve some kind of grasp, however personal or provisional, of its variety and magnitude. At the start of the twentieth century the majority of America's intercity roads were a mess, having fallen into disuse and disrepair as a result of the shift from horse and cart to the extensive rail network. Beyond the urban centers over 90 percent of roads were still dirt. A few had surfaces of gravel or shell. They were dusty when dry, quagmires when wet, and frequently impassible (opposite). Railroads had become more than a transport system. In cutting through mountains and conquering rivers, they were the symbolic heart of America's identity as an industrializing nation. By 1903 there were 250,000 miles of rail track but only 160,000 miles of badly surfaced roads, and just 141 miles of asphalt or concrete highway.[2] A cross-country trip in one of America's 4,000 automobiles would take an intrepid driver about two months. Despite the challenge, the promise of such trips was irresistible. While rail had bound the country together and made travel communal, the automobile reignited the pioneer spirit for a new century that would come to be defined by individual freedoms and independent venture.

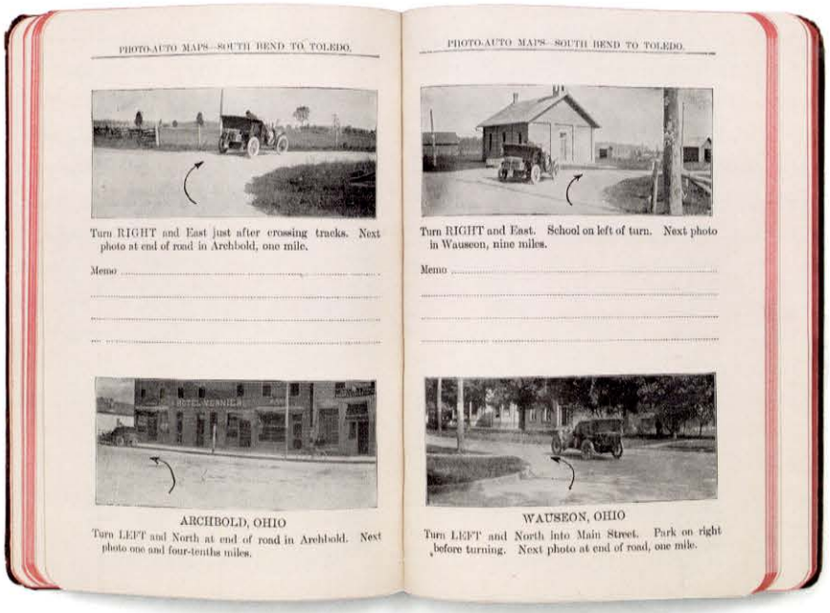
Car production grew rapidly, promoted by intensive campaigns presenting the automobile as a vital tool of commerce and a new source of leisure. Meanwhile a wholesale shift in photographic culture was well under way, with equally comprehensive promotion to get the country buying mass-market cameras with easy to use roll film. In 1888 George Eastman of Kodak prompted a major move from professional to amateur photography with his legendary slogan, "You Press the Button, We Do the Rest." Travel and picture taking were now in the hands of the people, or so the advertising went (opposite). More to the point, with its novel speeds and fresh encounters, travel itself began to heighten experience and sharpen the senses, often in ways that would permit the world to strike the beholder *as images*. Advertisers understood this very early, and photography could be marketed as a natural component of travel. The camera would both record the road trip experience and help to define it.

Let us begin our journey with a remarkably early and innovative experiment in publishing. Launched in 1906 the *Photo-Auto Guide* series of illustrated books replaced conventional maps with hundreds of photographs taken from a driver's point of view. Each book is dedicated to a popular route and shows every junction, bridge, and landmark along the way (and back again, with reverse views).[3] In the absence of consistent signage, or even agreed *names* for the longer roads, a visual aid was useful. Moreover, motorists could experience the thoroughly modern novelty of previewing the road ahead in photographic form. Twenty-five *Photo-Auto Guides* (opposite) were issued over five years, the most ambitious illustrating the epic drive between New York and Chicago. The venture, however, was a victim of its own success. By 1910 there were about 130,000 automobiles in use, plus 35,000 commercial trucks and 150,000 motorcycles. They so transformed the roadside environment that the photographs were soon outdated. A century on, the *Photo-Auto Guides* are extraordinarily rich documents not just of the look and feel of the early years of motoring but of the desire to put the camera at the service of the road trip. They are also uncanny precursors of the seamless image environment we now associate with Google's Street View, more on which at the other end of this history.

By 1930 there were 26.7 million automobiles in America, one for every 4.5 people. The pace and extent of the change was breathless and unparalleled. Interest in the situation spread around the world. Several photographers from overseas came to America to produce books that would satisfy the mass curiosity. Generally these were picturesque albums of beautiful landscapes interspersed with shots of awesome bridges, roads, and skyscrapers.[4] The most successful and bestselling was







CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN,
1902 CURVED DASH OLDSMOBILE ON
E. JEFFERSON AVE., NEAR DETROIT
CITY LIMITS AT THE TIME, J. W. MCCRAE
FACTORY TEST DRIVER

KODAK ADVERTISEMENT, 1917

THE RAND MCNALLY PHOTO-AUTO
MAP/GUIDE. NEW YORK TO CHICAGO.
CHICAGO TO NEW YORK, 1910.

E. O. HOPPÉ, *STREET SCENE, SUPERIOR CITY, ARIZONA*, 1926

OPPOSITE:
DR. KURT RICHTER AND FELIX MOESCHLIN, PAGES FROM *AMERIKA VOM AUTO AUS* (AMERICA FROM THE CAR), 1930

Romantic America (1927) by E. O. Hoppé, who was at the time the most celebrated and highest paid photographer in the world. He took several cross-country trips by car and the result was a book of forms in steel, concrete, and glass interspersed with grand images of nature. In the hope that the book would outlast the ever-quicker turnover of fashions, the publisher excluded most of Hoppé's images of people and cars. Nevertheless, Hoppé understood that the truth of modern life is often felt in the little details and signs of change. Clothing. Gesture. Temporary spaces. Makeshift structures. New vehicles. Many of his unpublished images (above) show the fascination with commonplace scenes that would come to characterize the work of key figures in the history of the road trip, including Walker Evans, Robert Frank, and Stephen Shore.

The car soon became the preeminent symbol of transition, not so much for its evolving styles and technology but for the effects it had upon its environment. As media theorist Marshall McLuhan put it years later: "With a motor car, most people are interested in changing designs or patterns of the car. They pay only incidental attention to the huge service environments of roads, oil companies, filling stations. . . . It never occurs to them that this figure of the car might generate a huge ground of new services far bigger than the figure was ever thought to be."[5]

The "figure of the car" is inseparable from the "ground" of the world that is changed around it. In 1930 the Swiss journalist Felix Moeschlin made a three-month, 12,500-mile tour of America in the company of amateur photographer Dr. Kurt Richter. The aim was to address the new changes in the country. With 154 images, their book *Amerika vom Auto Aus* (America from the car, opposite) takes in not only landscapes and big cities but also small towns, gas stations, Chinese communities, African-American workers in the rural South, and the growing gulf between rich and poor. The accomplished photographs are grouped into sequences that function as mini visual essays on these themes while also describing very directly the presence of automobiles and their impact. The authors' car is the unifying symbol; its hood, windows, and outline appear throughout. Richter recorded the slick new surfaces rolling out over the old dirt roads while Moeschlin noted how the car that makes it possible to cross the country with great freedom also shapes what there is to see. The car promises unprecedented access but brings unimaginable change.

THE GREAT AMERICAN ROADSIDE

Automobiles heralded a revolution on many fronts: social, technical, aesthetic, cultural, ecological, and financial. In 1934 the writer James Agee was commissioned by *Fortune* magazine to produce a report on the commercial implications of the automobile. Titled "The Great American Roadside" (page 12), his long

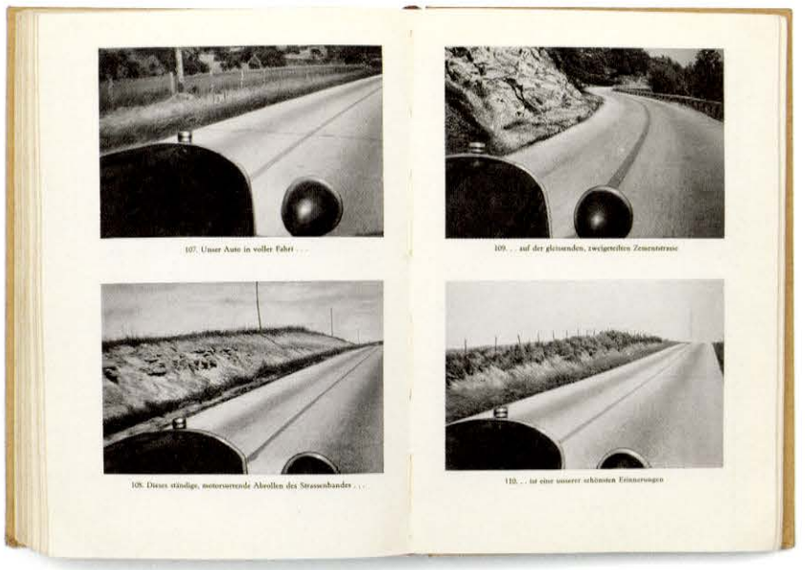
essay is an idiosyncratic meander, written in a visionary and fragmentary style entirely suited to the new subject. Lists of facts and poetic observations describe "the most hugely extensive market the human race has ever set up to tease and tempt and take money from the human race . . . a young but great industry that will gross, in this, the fifth year of the great world depression, something like $3,000,000,000."[6] Ice cream parlors, hot dog stands, quick-stop cafes, and cheap holiday cabins were sprouting around local landmarks, all advertised to the passing motorist. It was unstoppable, giving rise among newly mobile citizens to a whole new culture that was demotic and rootless. Provincial differences were being subsumed by the first American popular culture that could truly call itself national. It was not production that had united the country but consumption, propelled by the millions of motorists.[7]

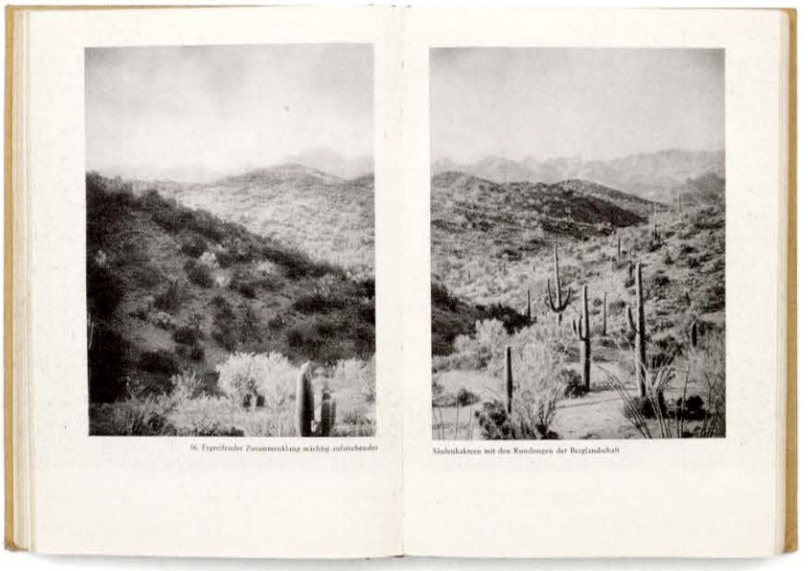
At the center of Agee's essay is the auto camp cabin, the forerunner of the modern motel. Variations on the doghouse, these single-room structures in wood or adobe clustered along the approaches to major leisure destinations.

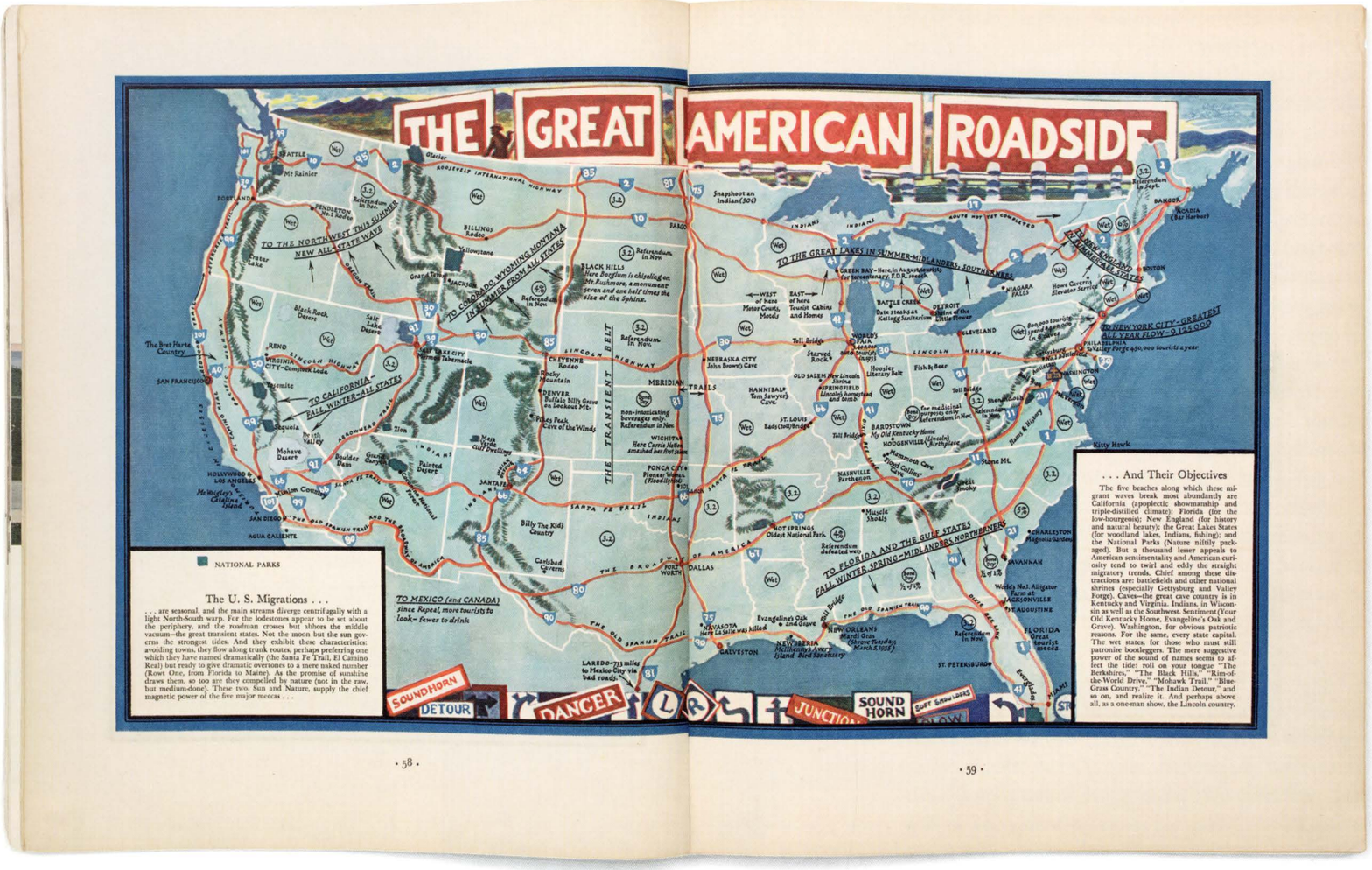
It is six in the afternoon and you are still on the road, worn and weary from the three hundred miles of driving. Past you flashes a sign DE LUXE CABINS ONE MILE. *Over the next hill you catch the vista of a city, smack in your path, sprawling with all its ten thousand impediments to motion—its unmarked routes, its trolley cars, its stop and go signs, its No Parking markers. Somewhere in the middle of it is a second-class commercial hotel, whose drab lobby and whose cheerless rooms you can see with your eyes closed. Beyond, around the corner, eyes still closed, you see the local Ritz with its doormen and its bellboys stretching away in one unbroken greedy grin. You see the unloading of your car as you stand tired and cross, wondering where you can find the nearest garage. Your wife is in a rage because she has an aversion to appearing in public with her face smudged, her hair disarranged and her dress crumpled. All these things and more you see with your eyes closed in two seconds flat. Then you open them. And around the next bend, set back amid a grove of cool trees you see the little semi-circle of cabins which the sign warned you of. You pull in by a farmhouse—or a filling station, or a garage—which registers instantly as the mother hen to this brood.*[8]

Roadside life "sprang up prodigally as morning mushrooms, and completed a circle that will whirl for pleasure and for profit as long as the American blood and the American car are so happily married."[9] It was the first comprehensive diagnosis of this new world. Although the writer's influence was not direct (the essay was published without his name on it) Agee had defined an inventory of sights and attitudes that would soon become common currency in American travel writing, art, and cinema.

While Agee's assessment was on the newsstands, moviegoers were flocking to Frank Capra's hit *It Happened*







JOHN STEUART CURRY,
PAGES FROM "THE GREAT AMERICAN ROADSIDE," FEATURED IN *FORTUNE* MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER 1934

CLARK GABLE AND CLAUDETTE COLBERT IN "IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT"
This advertising is the property of Columbia Pictures Corporation and is leased pursuant to an agreement for use only in connection with the exhibition of the above motion picture and prohibiting its sub-lease or resale. Made in U. S. A.

PUBLICITY PHOTOGRAPH
FROM THE FILM *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT*, 1934

ILYA ILF, FROM "AMERIKANSKIE FOTOGRAFII," *OGONEK*, 1936

One Night (1934, page 12), a comedy set largely in the new auto camps. This early "road movie" caught perfectly the spirit of highway adventure. The film tells the story of a runaway society heiress who meets a wily newspaper journalist hoping to cash in with a scoop on her whereabouts. From camp to camp they cross the country and fall in love. In the finale she leaves her millionaire fiancé at the altar, dashes to the journalist's waiting car, and they drive away. We do not see them working out their new life together, just making a return to the open road of hope and escape—where opposites are magically reconciled. A Hollywood ending for an era of motoring. Free of the norms of the city and home, the open road is where day-to-day obligations and perhaps even the restrictions of social class might fall away. Character is tested, values are reviewed, and for a while at least, alternative ideals are permitted to surface.

AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS

In 1935 Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, the Soviet Union's most celebrated satirists, arrived in New York for a ten-week tour. In their Ford, they crossed the country and back again, Ilf photographing with his Leica (above), Petrov penning wry observations. The Soviet Union was beginning to industrialize on a grand scale, and although America was still reeling from the economic crash of 1929 there was much to learn. The duo happily mocked America's vulgar excesses but they were in awe of how sophisticated technology had found its way into every corner of daily life. Back home their reports appeared in the popular magazine *Ogonek*, in illustrated installments portraying themes such as Small Towns, the Desert, Indians, Negroes, New York, California, Mark Twain, Advertising, and Hollywood (where they even stopped to write a film script).[10] Their first subject, however, was *roads*, the like of which they had never encountered. "Before we say that the American West is a mountainous country, or a desert country, or a forested country, we want to say the most central, important thing about it: it is an automotive and electrical country." The car symbolized the best and worst. It was the supreme embodiment of American modernity but it was clearly creating problems of its own, particularly road crashes and the alarming alienation of people from one another. According to Petrov:

There's something insulting about being passed. But in America the passion to pass each other is unusually developed and leads to an even larger number of catastrophes, crashes, and other such roadside adventures which are called "accidents" in America. Americans drive fast. With every year they drive faster: every year roads get better and automobile motors get more powerful. People drive fast, confidently, and on the whole carelessly. In any case, in America the dogs understand what a roadway is better than the drivers themselves do. American dogs are smart, and never run out onto the highway and don't race after cars with optimistic barking. They know what that leads to.

The name that Ilf and Petrov gave their report was "Amerikanskie fotografii" (American photographs). A year later this also became the title of what has proved to be the one of the most influential photographic books. In 1938 Walker Evans was the first photographer to receive a solo show at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The accompanying publication has been reprinted many times and remains a touchstone, not only for photographers but also for anyone interested in the 1930s. While Evans's *American Photographs* was not the result of a road trip as such, it drew on a decade of comprehensive travel through the center, South, and East (New York, New Orleans, Alabama, Atlanta, Florida). There is no geographic or narrative order to the book, but Evans developed a highly suggestive sequence that moves thematically, each image adding nuance to build a complex commentary on both America and the place of images within it. Nearly half his photographs contain other images and a quarter depict automobiles and roadside life. Evans was less interested in the great cities, preferring the small towns chanced upon by car. Here one could see new technology rubbing along with vernacular culture and a practical acceptance of the past. This mixture, thought Evans, provided the truest measure of the state of the nation.

The emblematic images in *American Photographs* are essentially found montages that highlight the new tensions of modern life, many of which seemed to stem

from the automobile. *Houses, Atlanta, Georgia* (1936, page 15) shows a brutal barrier built to shield houses from the noise and pollution of an expanded road. The porches of the well-appointed homes now look onto nothing, while the view from the upper balconies is a charmless strip. The movie billboards that festoon the barrier are not for the occupants but for motorists passing through. Evans set his formal and steady gaze against the speed of change. Measured, reflective, and unforced, he did not chase after progress; rather, he studied its cumulative consequences. Similarly, when his image, View Down Mainstreet with World War I Monument in the Foreground, Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania (1935, opposite), caught the eye of the British *Architectural Review*, the editors noted: "What is important about it (apart from the genius of the photographer, Walker Evans) is the conglomeration of objects—buildings, telegraph poles, street lamps, letter boxes, advertisements, signs, monuments—scattered, to an even more marked extent that they are everywhere else in the world, without any eye for ensemble."[11]

Pragmatism defined America more than any grand plan. Evans's framing of such haphazard scenes was light and unobtrusive, drawing attention to the adhoc composition of the world rather than his own compositional prowess. With little overt personal style or sentiment, Evans had developed a generous and perceptive vision drawing from his predecessors Mathew Brady and Eugène Atget. *American Photographs* swung wide the doors for generations of photographers. One can work in this idiom anywhere in America without risk of imitation or influence. It is impossible to imagine postwar photography in America without Evans's work, and countless photographers have been outspoken about their debt to it.

American Photographs includes several images of tenant farmers in the South who had been hit by the dire economy and severe drought of the mid-1930s. Many farmers were forced to leave their land to look for a better life, making fraught journeys westward to California. The mass migration, much of which took place by car, was documented more thoroughly by Dorothea Lange and published in 1939 as *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*. The photographs of decrepit automobiles creaking under the weight of families and possessions are some of the most vital and poignant of the era (opposite).

Lange was documenting the grim necessity of an uncertain road trip, far removed from the sphere of leisure and consumerism. Meanwhile on the East Coast, in what seemed like a world away, millions of visitors were waiting in line to catch a glimpse of an automated future. At the 1939 New York World's Fair, General Motors was sponsoring a vision of car culture in the

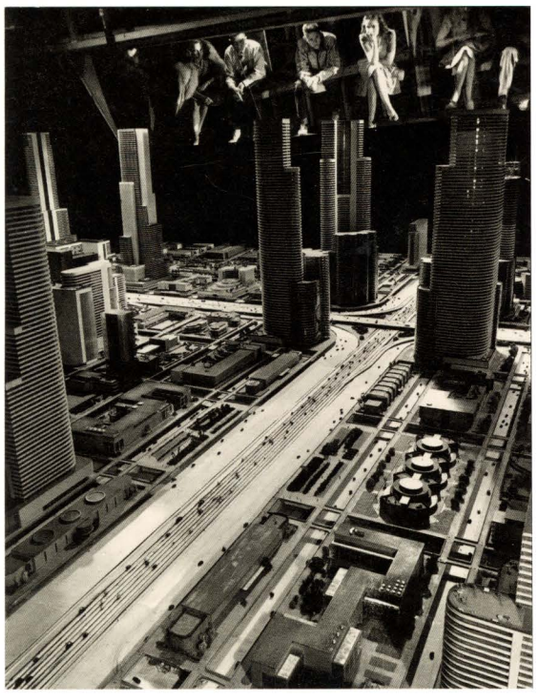
WALKER EVANS,
PARKED CAR, SMALL TOWN, MAIN STREET, 1932

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP:

DOROTHEA LANGE,
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DESERT,
MIGRANT FROM CHICKSAW,
OKLAHOMA, STALLED ON
THE DESERT IN SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA. HE AND HIS TEN
CHILDREN ARE FACING THE
FUTURE IN CALIFORNIA, 1937

WALKER EVANS,
HOUSES, ATLANTA, GEORGIA, 1936

WALKER EVANS,
VIEW DOWN MAIN STREET WITH
WORLD WAR I MONUMENT IN
FOREGROUND, MT. PLEASANT,
PENNSYLVANIA, 1935



MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE, *FUTURAMA SPECTATORS*, 1939

year 1960. Futurama: Highways and Horizons was a vast animated model covering nearly an acre (above). Viewed from above, it had more than half a million individually made buildings, hundreds of roads, and 50,000 cars (10,000 of which moved at robotic speed up and down the highways). In this grand utopia the bounties of the American wilderness provided the backdrop for a nationwide traffic infrastructure. Science, industry, and nature would be integrated harmoniously while seven-lane expressways took city workers—driving up to one hundred miles per hour—out to new suburbs and towns dotted with amusement parks and golf courses. The old architecture would be swept aside by the shiny veneer of a techno-wonderland. Reduced working hours in this brave new world would mean more time for long car trips.

As visitors stepped out of Futurama they found themselves in a full-size version of one of its intersections. Raised pedestrian walkways allowed the unimpeded flow of cars and buses at street level. The agenda of General Motors was blatant: more state-funded roads would lead to the purchase of more cars. But it was the sheer spectacle and order of the presentation that seduced audiences. America's conversion to the automobile had been so fast and chaotic that any picture of a comprehensive future would have been attractive. Masterminded by the architect Norman Bel Geddes, it was a bold statement but a last gasp for the kind of totalized planning that had so caught the imagination of designers and urbanists between the wars. The city as organism, with the car as blood cell, was a powerful idea but fatally flawed in its misreading of human needs and ecological effects. Nevertheless, President Roosevelt was impressed by Futurama and its core principle of a network of national highways would eventually become reality.

Corporate sponsorship need not be so heavy handed. In 1943 Standard Oil initiated a major photographic survey of all aspects of the oil industry worldwide, from wells and refineries to factories, homes, and automobiles. The project was run by Roy Stryker, who, in the 1930s, directed photographers at the government's Farm Security Administration.[12] Stryker had learned that the most valuable and lasting documents were made with only loose directives. Trusted photographers could be left to explore subjects as they found them. "You are not just photographing for Standard Oil," he urged his team, "you are photographing America. You are recording history."[13] Over the next eight years Stryker's thirteen core photographers assembled a substantial portrait of the country's relationship with oil. The surviving archive contains over one hundred thousand images, with an emphasis on roads and commercial transportation. A humanist and optimist, Stryker had managed to soften Standard Oil's demands for flattering images. Little of the project feels like publicity and the best of it, such as Esther Bubley's views of roadside life, is richly independent (pages 18–19).

In many respects such independence was a sign of the growing confidence and desire among ambitious photographers to find their own balance between art and report, between the prose of the document and the poetry of expression. Indeed much of the most noteworthy American photography of the mid-twentieth century emerged from this precarious balance between commissions that paid the bills and the creative impulse. The Standard Oil project showed what was possible if a reasonably sympathetic figure could mediate between a powerful corporation and the photographers it employed. Of course such circumstances were not common and in many respects the photographic road trip came to symbolize escape from the world and values of paid work. Going on the road was what photographers would do in opposition to commercial demands. But funding needed to come from somewhere.

In 1941 the Limited Editions Club of New York asked Edward Weston if he would consider making photographic illustrations for a new edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855. This epic poem was already a classic of American literature, filtering into popular culture to gift us, among other things, the phrase "the open road."[14] Whitman's words, sprawling without narrative, full of possibility and vivid imagery, continue to resonate with that sense of America as a land of roaming freedom and self-determination. As an artist of equally strong will and forceful vision, Weston was a canny choice. Like Whitman, he was a romantic whose work sprang from the dramatic encounter between inner subjectivity and an outer reality. With Whitman's mix of boldness and humility, Weston declared: "I am the adventurer on a voyage of discovery, ready to receive fresh impressions, eager for

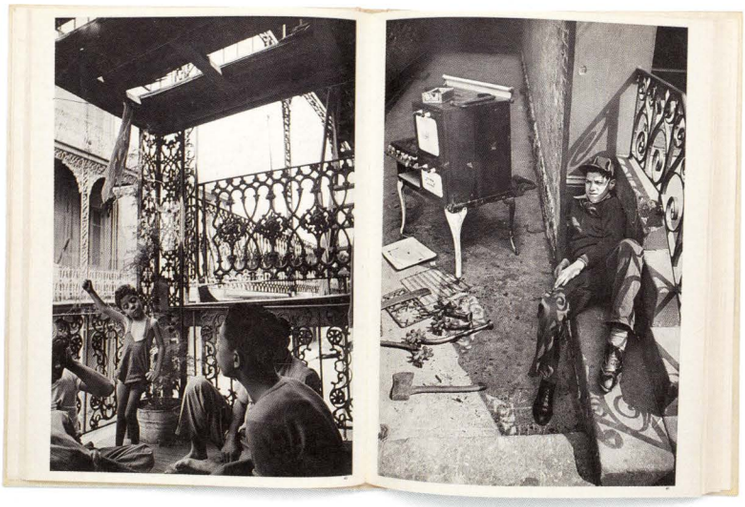
EDWARD WESTON, *MR. AND MRS. W. P. FRY, BURNET, TEXAS*, 1941

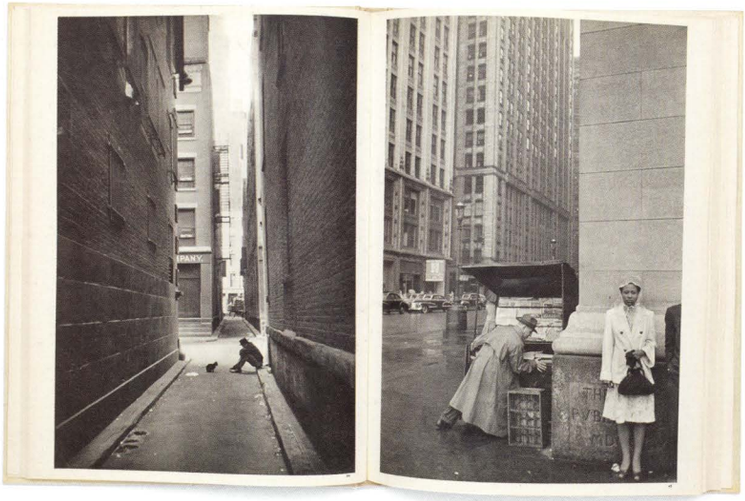
new horizons . . . not to impose myself or my ideas, but to identify myself in, and unify with, whatever I am able to recognize as significantly part of me: the 'me' of universal rhythms." He insisted there would be no "illustration . . . no effort to recapture Whitman's day. The reproductions . . . will have no titles, no captions. This leaves me great freedom—I can use anything from an airplane to a longshoreman."[15] Word and image would stand apart, leaving the viewer-reader to negotiate between the two men, their mediums and their very different historical moments. With his young wife Charis Wilson, he spent ten months traveling 25,000 miles from their home in Carmel, California, to New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, on to New Jersey and New York, then back via Illinois and the Dakotas. He photographed big cities as well as smaller towns, landscapes shaped by civilization and inhabitants standing before their homes or places of work (above). The commission drew Weston out of his isolation to make images of a shared world, a traveller photographing for fellow travellers. With few close-ups, he viewed his subject matter in great detail but at a discrete distance, as if pausing while passing through.

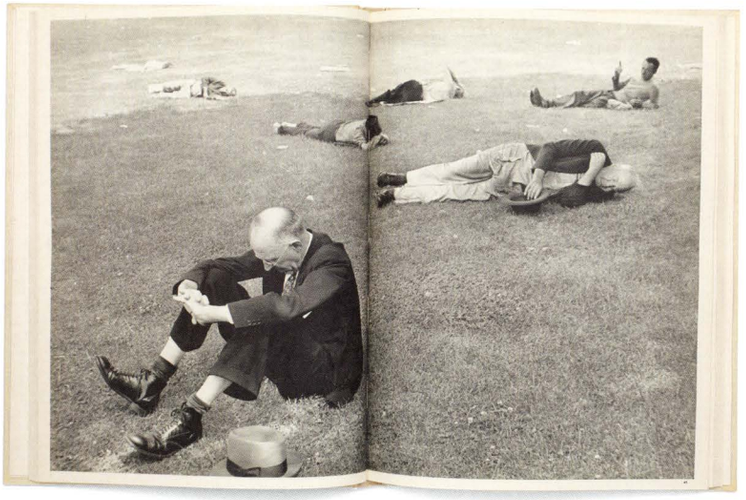
In 1946 Henri Cartier-Bresson came to New York from Paris to prepare for a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art. He was soon in New Orleans on assignment for *Harper's Bazaar*, where he met the poet and critic John Malcolm Brinnin. Cartier-Bresson longed to make

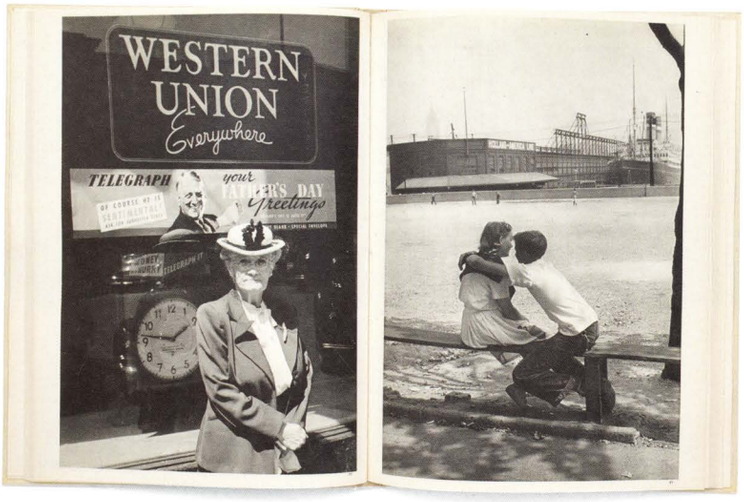
ESTHER BUBLEY,
CAR HOP SERVING MOTORISTS AT A DRIVE-IN EATING PLACE IN KEEMAH, TEXAS, SEPTEMBER 1945

ESTHER BUBLEY,
VIEW OF STREETS THROUGH WINDSHIELD
OF GREYHOUND BUS, JERSEY CITY,
NEW JERSEY, MARCH 1948





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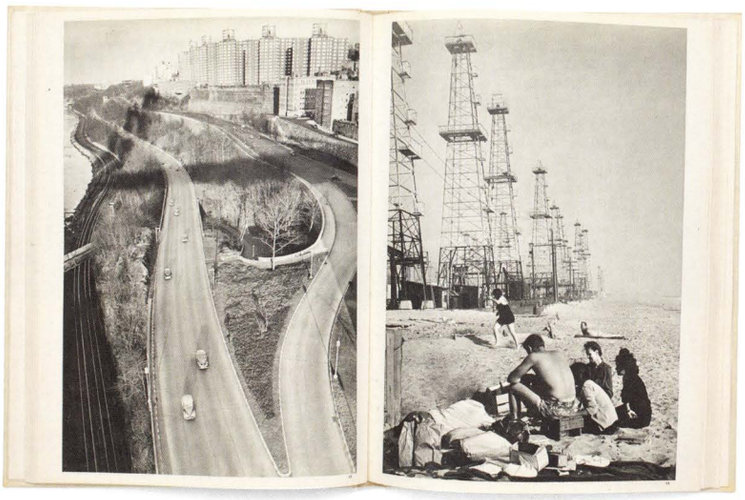
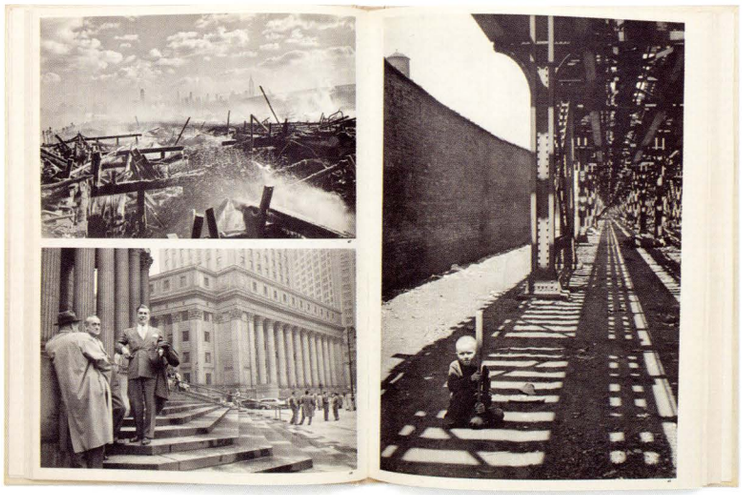
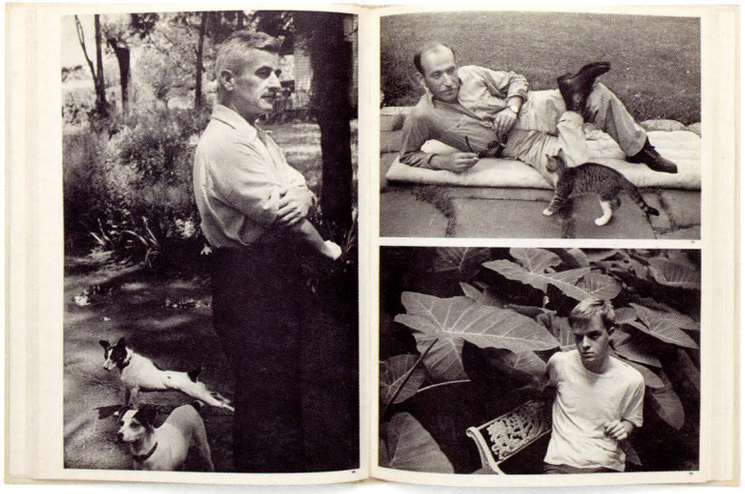
UNION
Everywhere
TELEGRAPH your





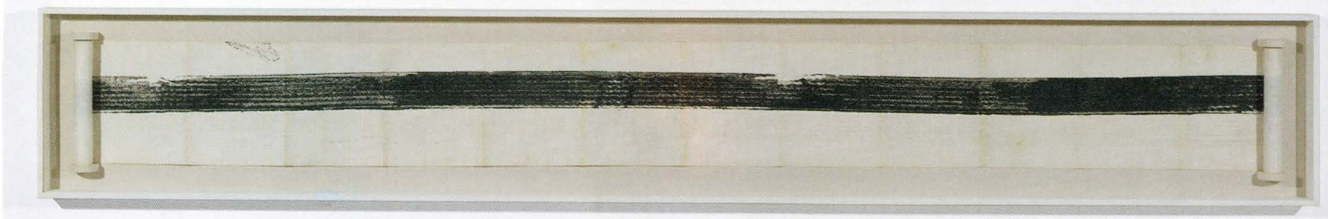


a substantial survey of the country. In April 1947 he and Brinnin secured an advance from *Harper's* for profiles of assorted artists and writers scattered across the land. Brinnin recalled their departure: "I made a last survey, picked Walker Evans's book *American Photographs* from a shelf and placed it face up on the backseat."[16] Brinnin planned the route and drove the car. Cartier-Bresson watched the passing scenery and called for occasional stops. The seventy-seven days of travel invigorated the photographer. He soon had enough exemplary images for a whole publication. *Harper's* art director Alexey Brodovitch laid out a book dummy and Pantheon agreed to publish. But with busy schedules the project dragged and Cartier-Bresson lost patience. Brinnin grew anxious that he might be sidelined from the project, Brodovitch eventually mislaid the dummy, and the project never came to fruition. The first real sign of the quality of Cartier-Bresson's work came with his book *The Decisive Moment* (1952).[17] It contains a sequence of twenty American images (opposite), opening with anonymous citizens in Los Angeles and New York, and concluding with three portraits (William Faulkner in Oxford, Mississippi; Truman Capote in New Orleans; and Saul Steinberg in Vermont). In between are shots from Cape Cod, Chicago, Boston, Iowa, and New Jersey. Exquisitely observed, they are lyrical but haunted pictures of a country uneasy with itself, a view quite at odds with the postwar promise portrayed in the mass media. Although car culture barely appears, there is a shot of the epic sweep of Manhattan's Westside Highway. Cartier-Bresson's attention to small human incident falls away as he gasps from above at this vast terrain of the automobile.[18] The world promised in Futurama was coming into being, at least in parts of the country.

As longer trips became easier, the popular image of major highways came to be defined less by commercial necessity and more by recreation. Getting your "kicks on Route 66" is the obvious example (the famous song was released by Nat King Cole in 1947), but the Pacific Coast Highway in California and US Route 1 on the East Coast were also marketed as expansive leisure drives. In the summer months of 1954, Berenice Abbott photographed the full length of Route 1, from Maine to Florida.[19] The aim was to shoot intensively and capture a moment in rapid transition, an approach she had first developed in her 1939 book *Changing New York*. Many of her 2,400 exposures of US 1 were color and show roadside culture of 1954 in all its particular charm and excess (page 22). Along with Walker Evans and Eugène Atget before her, Abbott understood that what is most familiar to modern life is often what is most fleeting, and its significance may only become

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON,
PAGES FROM *THE DECISIVE MOMENT* SHOWING
HIS 1947 AMERICAN ROAD TRIP, 1952

HAPPY'S
HOT DOGS
DRINK
Coca-Cola
IN BOTTLES
PEANUTS
POPCORN
FILM
ICE
CREAM
DAYTONA BEACH, FLA.



apparent once it has disappeared. In this regard one of the highest callings for a photographer, and one of the toughest challenges, is to document the present for sake of the future. It requires acute attention to the things around you that others are taking for granted. Unsurprisingly, such photographs may often appear inconsequential: Abbott's project was overlooked in its time and languished for decades. Today it provides us with rich insight into the character of what turned out to be a very short-lived moment. One can sense the force of mass marketing beginning to assert itself, but there is still a feeling of locality and difference in Abbott's photographs.

ONE LONG FLOW

By 1950 over one hundred million cars had been manufactured in America, mainly in Detroit, with over three million sold annually. The expansion was relentless. On June 29, 1956, Dwight D. Eisenhower signed legislation commencing the largest peacetime public works project the world had seen. Tax on gas would raise $33 billion annually to build 41,000 miles of new roads. Oil prices were low and the auto lobbies powerful. Cold War anxiety also played its part, with advocates promising smooth passage for the military and ample provision for the evacuation of cities in the event of a nuclear strike. The National System of Interstate and Defense Highways would speed up transport and improve safety. It would also homogenize the driving experience with uniform road surfaces, standard intersections, and a nationwide system of signage. In theory, all of this would democratize the automobile once and for all. As neither luxury nor necessity, the automobile would simply be a matter of fact, as integral to the life Americans as walking. Or perhaps more so.

The desire to tie the country in one smooth ribbon of asphalt and concrete was paralleled by many other forms of standardization. American life was being transformed by corporate culture, modular architecture, the spread of chain stores, and the marketing of populist taste through nationwide television and advertising. Commercialized imagery in the home, on the street, and at the roadside was constant and unavoidable. Visual culture was beginning to be defined less by its peaks of quality or idiosyncrasy than by its low background drone. In different ways much of the advanced American art and photography of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s responds to this flattening of experience, this waning of affect. Boredom and repetition became the new muses: Pop art displayed serial media imagery with deadpan wit (think of Andy Warhol's repeated images derived from press photos of car crashes); conceptual art reduced visual pleasure to chilly analysis and flat facts. In many respects artists such as Walker Evans, Stuart Davis, and Edward Hopper had already intuited this sensibility in the 1920s and 1930s. A generation later, all three were heralded as pioneers of a new American vernacular.

In 1953 Robert Rauschenberg had his friend the musician John Cage drive a Ford Model A over twenty sheets of typewriter paper, glued together as a long strip. The artist poured black house paint onto an advancing front wheel to give a continuous impression. The result was titled simply *Automobile Tire Print* (1953, opposite) and presented as a scroll, rolled at either end to make its length uncertain. It may be the shortest and slowest road trip ever recorded, but it broke new ground, turning the expressive gesture beloved of abstract painting into an automated mark aligned with photography as a medium of mundane traces and evidence.

In 1947 the writer Jack Kerouac was thinking about a novel that would express the free-flowing life made possible by the automobile. Throughout the following years he made extended trips with friends, including Neal Cassady and Allen Ginsberg (above left). He kept notes about everything: people, politics, places, work, food, cars, lovers. Lonely landscapes of empty beauty seen from a moving car formed the backdrop. "We were pointed towards that enormity which is the American continent," Kerouac wrote.[20] He tested various approaches to writing and in 1951 he concluded that the best way to capture the spirit was to get it down fast, in one long flow. Over three intensive weeks, he typed a continuous single-spaced paragraph on sheets of tracing paper joined into a 120-foot roll. Ginsberg called it "spontaneous bop prosody." Although it had a traditional narrative, no publisher would accept it. Kerouac eventually reworked his manuscript and formalized the typesetting, but it was the text produced in an unbroken burst of creative energy that brought *On the Road* (1957) into being.

OPPOSITE:
BERENICE ABBOTT,
HAPPY'S REFRESHMENT STAND, DAYTONA BEACH, FLORIDA, 1954

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG,
AUTOMOBILE TIRE PRINT, 1953

ABOVE:
ALLEN GINSBERG, *ON THE ROAD WITH NEIL CASSADY*, CALIFORNIA, 1948

Road and Trees (1962, below) is Edward Hopper's fifth from final canvas. The quietly disarming landscape distills an eventless evening drive in the country. Hopper and his wife had taken many car trips throughout their life and the iconography of the road—gas stations, pump attendants, roadside diners, deserted highways—had been central to his work for decades. Here, however, Hopper was stripping out everything unnecessary. In an early study for the painting he included a solitary car, but even that slips from the final picture. Movement is suggested simply through the slight "blur" in the trees and the linear flow of the composition; a view is taken in on the move between one place and another.

The following year the California conceptual artist John Baldessari produced a grid of snapshot photographs titled *The Backs of All the Trucks Passed While Driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, California, Sunday, 20 January 1963*. A few months later, Edward Ruscha published the first of his influential artist's books, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, photographed on one of his regular trips from Los Angeles back to his parents' home in Oklahoma City. Ruscha's images—with matter-of-fact titles such as *SHELL, Daggett, California*; *TEXACO, Jackrabbit, Arizona*; and *STANDARD, Amarillo, Texas*—look like real estate snaps and his book has the perfunctory design of a cheap guide (opposite). Three years later, he issued *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), a foldout panorama twenty-six feet in length. It was as bold in form as it was bland in content: a funereal tracking shot through the seductive monotony of Los Angeles.

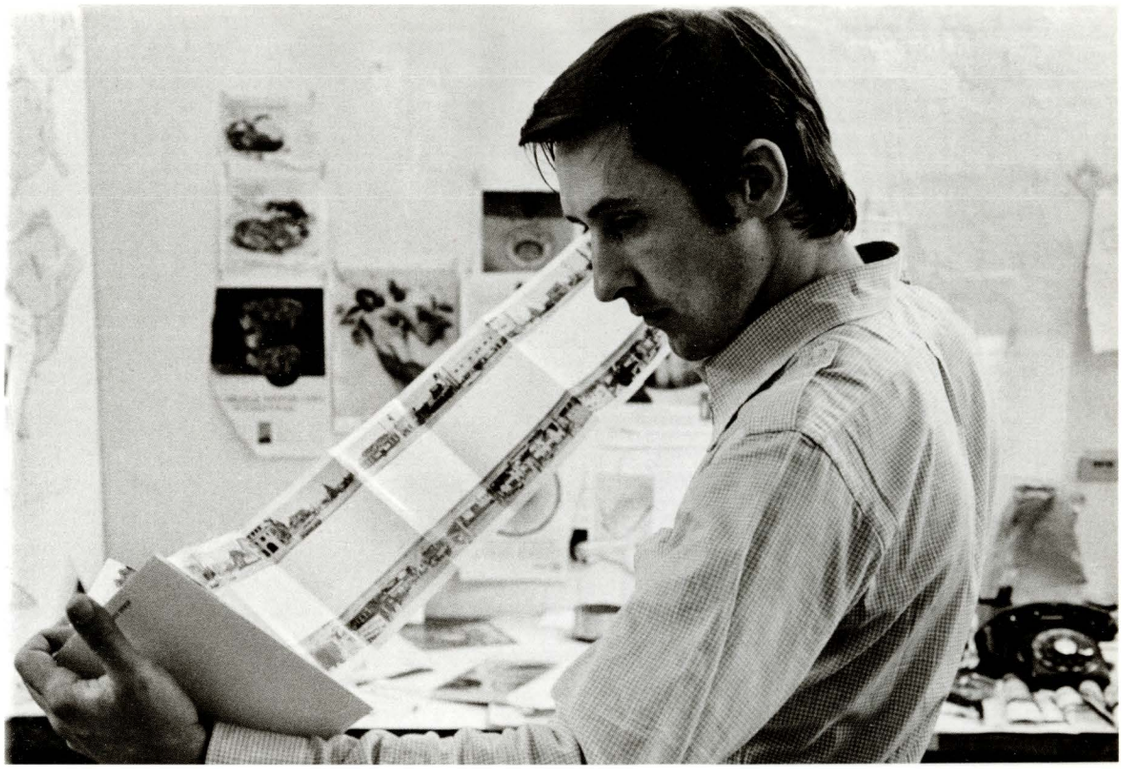
In different ways then, Rauschenberg, Kerouac, Hopper, Baldessari, and Ruscha were all attempting to express *continuous* experience. They had broken with that older ideal of the exemplary and singular depiction of the exemplary and singular instant or scene. In order to get at the new character of America, it was the non-moments in between that needed to be described. The "all" and the "every." The scroll and the panorama. Systematic documentation and the itemized itinerary. Such forms flirt with the promise of not having to make choices. The world is taken in without edits or selection, or at least without the hierarchy of narrative. No beginnings, no conclusions, no symbolism. Just the facts presented so barely that they might unnerve a viewer expecting something else. Moreover, these were responses to the growing feeling that what was coming to define the look and feel of America was its *ongoingness*. What you see goes on forever down the road, and forever into the future: an inevitable, unrelenting, permanent now. Yes, this might be alienated art about alienation, redeemable only through irony or a shrug, or a primal scream, yet many artists, writers, filmmakers, and photographers felt that way. Even if it was clear that the wheels would eventually come off this juggernaut of "progress," it was by no means obvious how or when, or what the alternative might be.

NEW AMERICANS

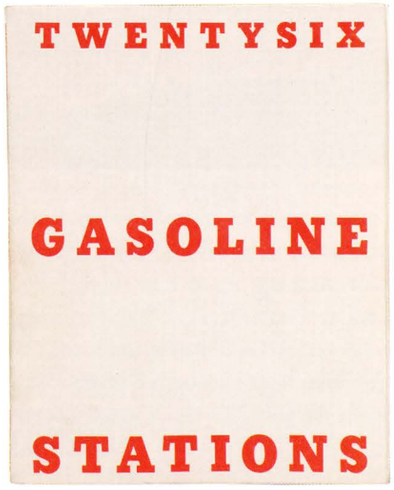
In this regard, the watershed American photographic project of the second half of the twentieth century is Robert Frank's book *The Americans*, published in 1958/59. Frank had worked commercially for American magazines, notably *Harper's Bazaar*, but sensed what he wanted to do was beyond commercial commission. "I didn't want to produce what everybody else was producing. I wanted to follow my own intuition and do it my way, and not make any concession—not to make a *Life* story. . . . Those goddamned stories with a beginning and an end."[21] So with a proposal to make a "broad, voluminous picture record of things American," a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation, and a 1950 Ford, Frank went on the road between 1955 and 1957.

EDWARD HOPPER,
ROAD AND TREES, 1962

JERRY MCMILLAN,
ED RUSCHA UNFOLDING *EVERY BUILDING ON THE SUNSET STRIP*, 1967



COVER OF ED RUSCHA'S *TWENTYSIX GASOLINE STATIONS*, 1963



Frank insisted that the project needed to be "essentially elastic" and would "shape itself as it proceeds."[22] The result was a vast survey of all that seemed uncomfortable in the American psyche, captured by a photographer with a rare ability to turn the most unpromising moments into new symbols. In his introduction to *The Americans*, Jack Kerouac compared Frank's sensibility to a jazz musician.[23] Indeed, four groundbreaking jazz albums appeared in 1959: Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*, Charles Mingus's *Mingus Ah Um*, and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. Bebop had exploded, with space opening out to take players and listeners down side roads and byways. But underneath was a pulse, or at least the intimation of one. Brubeck felt this music expressed a distinctively new "American Scene." At a formal level, Frank's photography was its visual equivalent. Confident yet unpredictable, he could weave around his chosen motifs: ragged American flags, lone jukeboxes, glowing television screens, and detached citizens dwarfed by their automobiles. He attuned himself to the way the background and foreground of daily experience could switch without warning. Out of the humdrum the unexpected lunges forward. Behind a glowing starlet at a Hollywood premier the common faces of the watching crowd are compelling. Under this tarpaulin is a car but under *that* one, perhaps a body (pages 26 and 49). From Frank's underlying structure sprang great fountains of invention, existing from moment to moment through wits alone. And between the instants he was able to evoke the miles and miles, the hours and hours of tedium. Many photographers have spoken of what driving for long periods can do to the visual imagination.

There are times when it becomes trancelike. There are also times when the experience of the landscape rolling by can empty the mind and make the photographer intensely alert, so that when they step from the car they are hypersensitive to the world around them. The switch in tempo, from driving with hands on the wheel to walking with hands on the camera, can be profound. Indeed Frank, like many subsequent photographers based in New York City (including Stephen Shore and Joel Sternfeld) hadn't even *owned* a car until deciding upon a road trip. The thrill of mobility was new and led to a heightened awareness of the motion of driving and the stillness of photography.

Frank's attention recast photography as a needle flickering on the dial of the everyday, registering the tiniest tremors. It was startlingly supple. Years later he recalled, "I was in good shape back then." Such photography is exhausting and it takes a toll on the body and nervous system, but Frank held it together long enough to produce an anti-epic of troubling, bitter, angry, and yet melancholy beauty. The debt to his mentor Walker Evans is clear enough, but Frank rejected the cool and dispassionate gaze for a vision so willfully subjective that each image is as much a record of his own state of mind as a report on the world. He was also more explicit in his commentary on everything from tense race relations and the crudeness of mass culture to the numbing effects of political disenfranchisement. While Frank was far from alone in his anger and alienation, the extraordinary quality of his observation has come to stand in for the disillusionment of the era. And while the impact of Evans's vision has been slow and consistent, the influence of Frank's work was much more sudden, traumatic even. Within a few years many were trying to work in his vein, but it was really too complete and closed, too tied to Frank's own specific subjectivity. *The Americans* was definitive and inimitable, but in its perfection it signaled that if more was to be said on the road about America, other directions would have to be taken.

A WRONG TURN

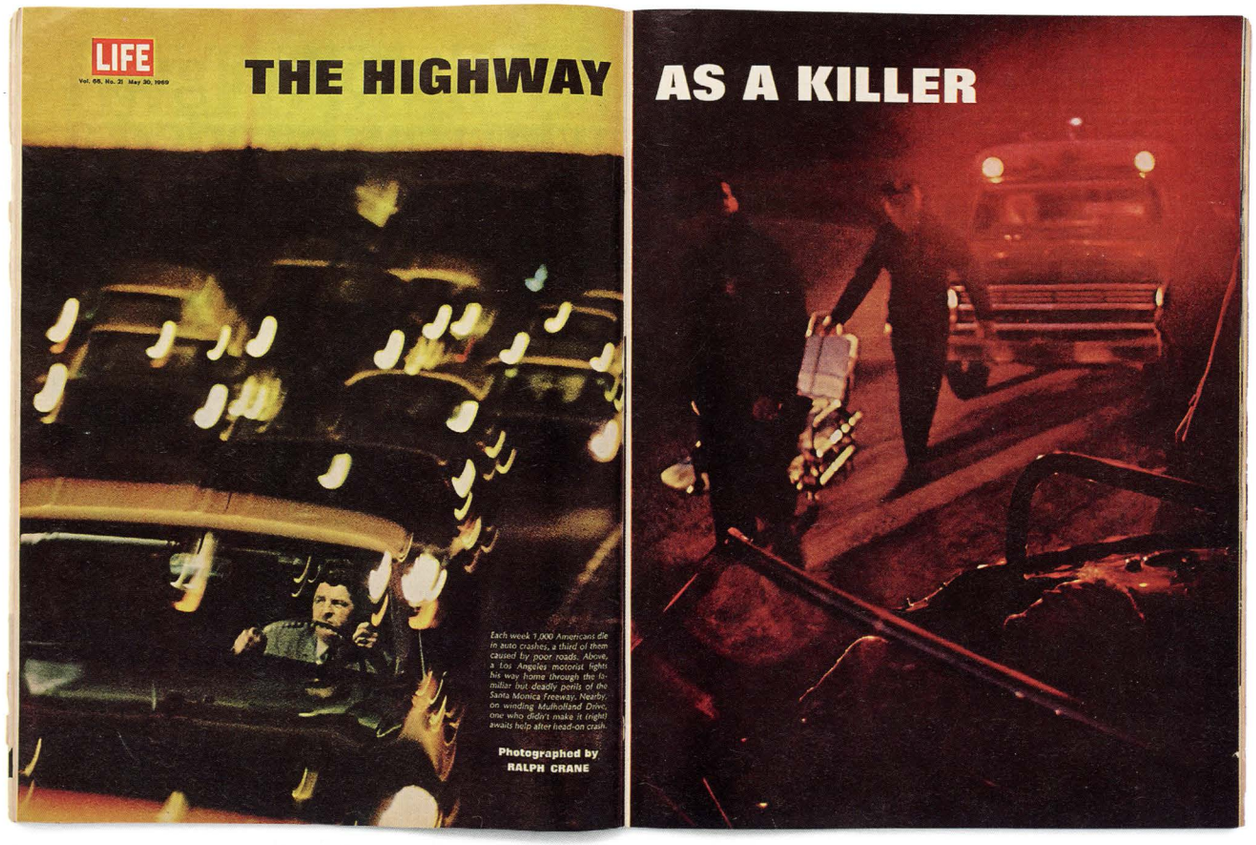
In an essentially conservative decade, the primary revolution of 1950s America was aesthetic. The boom in manufacturing technology elevated design as never before, pitching the automobile fully into the realm of consumer goods. Cars were not just workhorses, or a means of getting away from it all, they were symbols of taste and aspiration. The latest models shared curves and colors with the latest kitchen gadgets, furniture, shop displays, buildings, graphics, and even clothes. In 1956 the cultural critic Roland Barthes declared: "I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic Cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object."[24]

ROBERT FRANK,
COVERED CAR, LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA, 1956

Of course Gothic cathedrals were built to last. Once the automobile becomes part of consumer culture, obsolescence is built in. This is illustrated perfectly by a snapshot taken by Walker Evans in 1955 (page 28). He was on the road in Putnam, Connecticut, shooting a photo-essay on old mill architecture for *Fortune* magazine. Robert Frank was with him as a friend and paid assistant.[25] As they waited for the light to contour the facade of the mill in the background, Frank sat at the wheel of Evans's shapely Buick Roadmaster convertible. We would not be surprised to hear that the mill stands to this day, but it would be something of a miracle if that Buick is still going. So the frame captures two epochs of design, two cultures, and two temperaments of photography. While Evans was interested in the ways in which history persists into the present, Frank shot images that contain few traces of the past.

Although Frank had left his native Switzerland in 1947, he retained the dislocation that many Europeans experience in America's great expanse. For strangers such wide-open space is thrilling and terrifying, an echo chamber for whatever the isolated soul is feeling. The frisson of existential angst and fleeting euphoria is part of the appeal of many a road trip. As *The Americans* was published, the country-crossing film *North by Northwest* was released. Alfred Hitchcock's caper about a suave Madison Avenue advertising executive getting mistaken for an FBI agent seems the polar opposite of Frank's worldview. But at root they are about the same things seen from either end of the social spectrum: American anxiety, secrecy and power, manipulative images, deceptive appearances, and troubled masculinity. When Cary Grant is dumped by a Greyhound bus on a dusty highway in the middle of nowhere, his curiosity quickly turns to fear as he is set upon by a murderous airplane. For the British director those open roads and distant horizons were as much a source of foreboding as excitement. Indeed, Hitchcock began his next film, *Psycho* (1960), by stacking up all the over-familiar ingredients of the road movie: a pile of cash, wild love, an impulsive plan, and a car to flee the city. Real estate clerk Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) steals a client's money and takes off. When she leaves the Interstate Highway to look for a motel her fate is sealed. She ends up dead, stabbed by the creepy owner and put in the trunk of her own car. The new freeways had cut off America's rural communities, establishing a vast hinterland of resentment, regret, and repression. Or so Hitchcock was suggesting. *Psycho* did for the country's byways and sleepy motels what Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* would do for sharks. American culture still finds it difficult to shake the idea that its big cities embody the present and its small towns the past. Consequently, one of the major attractions of the road trip has become the fantasy of time travel. The open road leads back to what was, or at least to someplace where time passes more slowly.

As we have seen, the postwar expansion of America's car culture was rapid and consuming. Many Americans


LIFE
Vol. 66, No. 21 May 30, 1969
THE HIGHWAY
AS A KILLER
Each week 1,000 Americans die in auto crashes, a third of them caused by poor roads. Above, a Los Angeles motorist fights his way home through the familiar but deadly perils of the Santa Monica Freeway. Nearby, on winding Mulholland Drive, one who didn't make it (right) awaits help after head-on crash.
Photographed by
RALPH CRANE

WALKER EVANS,
ROBERT FRANK AT THE WHEEL OF EVANS'S BUICK ROADMASTER, 1955

RALPH CRANE, COVER WITH FOLD-OUT,
LIFE MAGAZINE, MAY 30, 1969

certainly gained a keener sense of the scope of the nation, and the promise of democratic travel had in many ways been fulfilled. At the same time however, there was a growing sense that the expansion had been hasty and shortsighted. Beyond the marginalization of small towns, it was clear that more roads were leading to more cars. Congestion was getting worse, and the environmental impacts were becoming impossible to ignore. Meanwhile, the safety of even the latest cars and roads was in question. In 1965 Ralph Nader's exposé *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile* became a bestseller. In May 1969 *Life* magazine published "The Highway as a Killer," a damning report with lurid photographs by Ralph Crane (opposite). The opening statement was unequivocal: "More Americans will die in traffic accidents this year than have died in the entire Vietnam war. . . . State highway departments have been more interested in multiplying the miles of new expressways than in making them safe."[26] It was a shocking statement, bringing together problems abroad and problems at home. Meanwhile fumes and tailbacks choked many cities, and the sightlines on the monotonous new roads were causing "highway hypnosis."[27]

Compounding all this, the coming decade brought crises in global oil markets that caused sudden shortages at the gas stations. For the first time, the wider world confronted the fact that oil was a finite resource and pivotal to contemporary geopolitics. The ideal of the tank always full and the freeway always empty was beginning to slip away. While it would be misplaced to say that the American road had reached a dead end, it certainly began to symbolize a different set of values.

We can see this shift in attitudes both in road trip photography and the road movie, that flexible genre that has expressed many of the nation's aspirations and anxieties for the better part of a century. It is always difficult to end a road movie, because its essential attraction is escape and the engine of its narrative is momentum. What should happen at the end of a road trip? A return to the status quo? A revolutionary new beginning? A few minor adjustments to one's outlook? Obviously it is not enough to drive west and arrive in the Promised Land. Hollywood responded to the petro-political upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s with a string of road movies that ended badly in every sense. In *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), the glamorous bank robbers run out of options and meet their end in a hailstorm of slow-motion bullets beside their car. The counter-cultural heroes of Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969) are gunned down on a whim by stereotypical rednecks. The camera rises to view their bodies from on high as if the only way to leave the fateful road is through an out-of-body experience. The existential driver in Richard C. Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* slams into a roadblock and is consumed by fire. Steven Spielberg's chase movie *Duel* climaxes with the key vehicles toppling into a ravine. Monte Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop*, a story of men drag racing across America, ends with an illusion of celluloid burnout as if the projector has stalled on an arbitrary final frame that melts on screen. The latter three films were all released in 1971 and countless nihilistic imitations followed. Clearly the road was still a powerful if contested metaphor: for the perceived halt in the nation's progress, for the wrong turn that followed the radical hopes of the early 1960s, or more generally for the crushing of civil freedoms by consumerism and the state war machine.

These films were trying to express paralysis, a suspension perhaps better served by the still image than narrative cinema. Photographs show but are rarely expected to explain or resolve. Instead they propose to the viewer a state of affairs—social, psychological, pictorial—to be contemplated. Since coherent narrative is largely beyond the scope of the still image, road trip photography is not required to face the problem of endings. Few photographers make narratives in the strict sense, preferring associative or poetic sequences, albums, typologies, or just collections of epiphanies. *The Bikeriders* (1968, page 31), Danny Lyon's insider account of the Chicago Outlaws biking club, shows the dynamics of a subculture that had rejected the automobile as a symbol of conformity. The project was one of the inspirations for *Easy Rider* but with a set of photographs Lyon was able to simply show what was, without forcing a narrative arc. His book is a report on a scene and now stands as a complex document.

Between 1968 and 1974, Joel Meyerowitz made an extensive and circumspect body of work on the road titled Still Going: America During Vietnam. Returning from Europe, Meyerowitz found himself in a country that was anxious but increasingly complicit with dumb culture and war overseas. Americans were rightly suspicious of their own government yet still determined to swagger and celebrate when they could. And across the landscape were traces—remnants and rejects—of military activity. Training facilities, test sites, rockets redeployed as absurd monuments. Meyerowitz's images are ragged and uncertain, as if he was searching for a form to express the disquiet (page 31). There is no narrative to the project, just a series of unsettling glimpses of unsettled times.

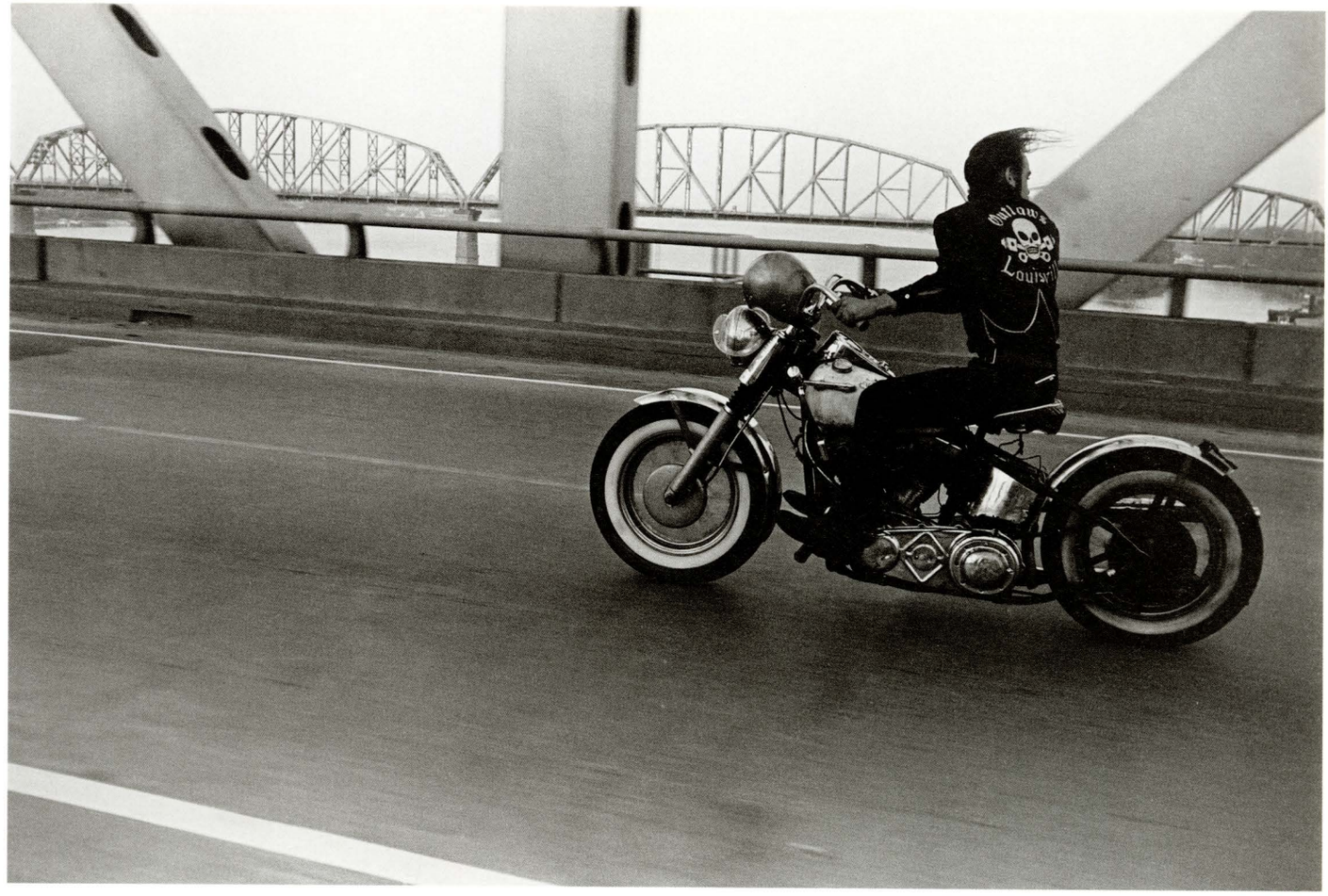
Hereafter the long-repeated promises of liberty and freedom begin to haunt the American imagination and the road trip like broken promises. Moreover, the haunting happens increasingly at the level of images. Recycled ad nauseam in mainstream culture, the open road was hardening into ridged mythology, a set of fixed fantasies stuck in the past, endlessly looping around the hallowed and thoroughly exploited Route 66. As early as 1961 Daniel Boorstin lamented how much of everyday life, and travel in particular, had become a "pseudo event," a "tautology" of predictable adventure and prepackaged risk in which "the more we work to enlarge our experience, the more pervasive the tautology becomes."[28]

RICHARD CHILDRESS,
PAT SULLIVAN LOWERS HER
HEAD IN DESPAIR WHILE
WAITING FOR GAS IN A LONG
LINE YESTERDAY AT LAFAYETTE
AND CHARLES STREET,
THE BALTIMORE SUN, JUNE 15,
1979

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
DOUGHBOY, STAMFORD,
CONNECTICUT, 1973

OPPOSITE:
DANNY LYON,
CROSSING THE OHIO, 1966

JOEL MEYEROWITZ,
KANSAS, 1969



STEPHEN SHORE,
MERCED RIVER, YOSEMITE, 1979

For serious photographers the carapace of familiarity was becoming difficult to break open. And yet, the open road remained ever more seductive. What is striking about projects made on the road since the 1970s is the way they challenge the twin profusion of cars and clichés. Lee Friedlander's epic album *The American Monument* (1976) begins like a nineteenth-century inventory of public statuary but soon turns into a comic parable. Historical markers of civic achievement in metal and stone are swamped by street signs and parking lots. Architecture becomes inseparable from advertising and the concept of space itself becomes increasingly commercialized (page 30). All land is to be understood as real estate and subjected to its ever-faster rhythms. The essential wildness of space, which is still so central to the American imagination, slides to the edges of perception without disappearing entirely. In Stephen Shore's *Merced River, Yosemite, 1979* (left), from his extended series Uncommon Places, we see a version of nature that has been preserved at the cost of its innocence if not its majesty. This sublime heartland of the American landscape was once penetrable by only the likes of intrepid nineteenth-century survey photographers. It is now a weekend destination in easy reach of West Coast city dwellers and tourists. It is not a theme park, yet, but the possibility is there. Unlike Carleton Watkins or Ansel Adams before him, Shore rendered the famous skyline almost like a painted Hollywood backdrop. His photograph suggests that even if you were there it would feel like an image. Similarly, in Mitch Epstein's pictures of the country at leisure in the 1970s and 1980s, we sense both the photographer and his subjects feeling their way through America as image (page 35). Epstein published this body of work much later (in 2005), under the title *Recreation*, a word perfectly poised between meanings: "play" and "remaking."

When Joel Sternfeld took to the road in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he brought with him an inherited iconography from the nation's great commentators

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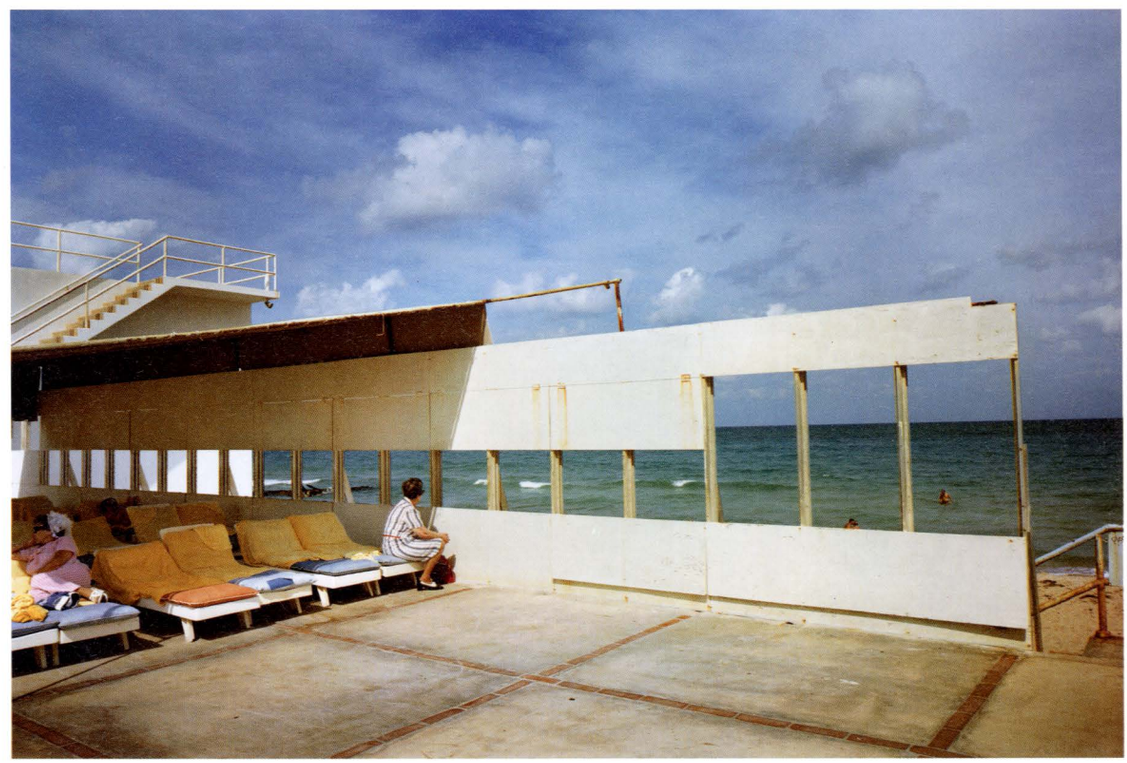
and picture-makers. As Joshua C. Taylor suggested, in a book close to Sternfeld's heart, it is instructive to understand *America as Art*.[29] The making of art is part of the continuous remaking of the nation. Sternfeld titled his landmark book *American Prospects* (1987)—prospects as in both "views," prospects as in "likely future." Like Shore a few years ealier, Sternfeld was looking to reinvigorate a formal approach with his 8-by-10 camera, producing images that played historical continuity against the unexpected ruptures of contemporary life. Classical calm is unsettled by disarming sights: a landslide in suburbia, the space shuttle piggybacking a 747, a sanatized Wet'n Wild water park trumping the age-old pleasures of the great outdoors, sublime landscapes requiring signs to advertise their beauty (opposite).

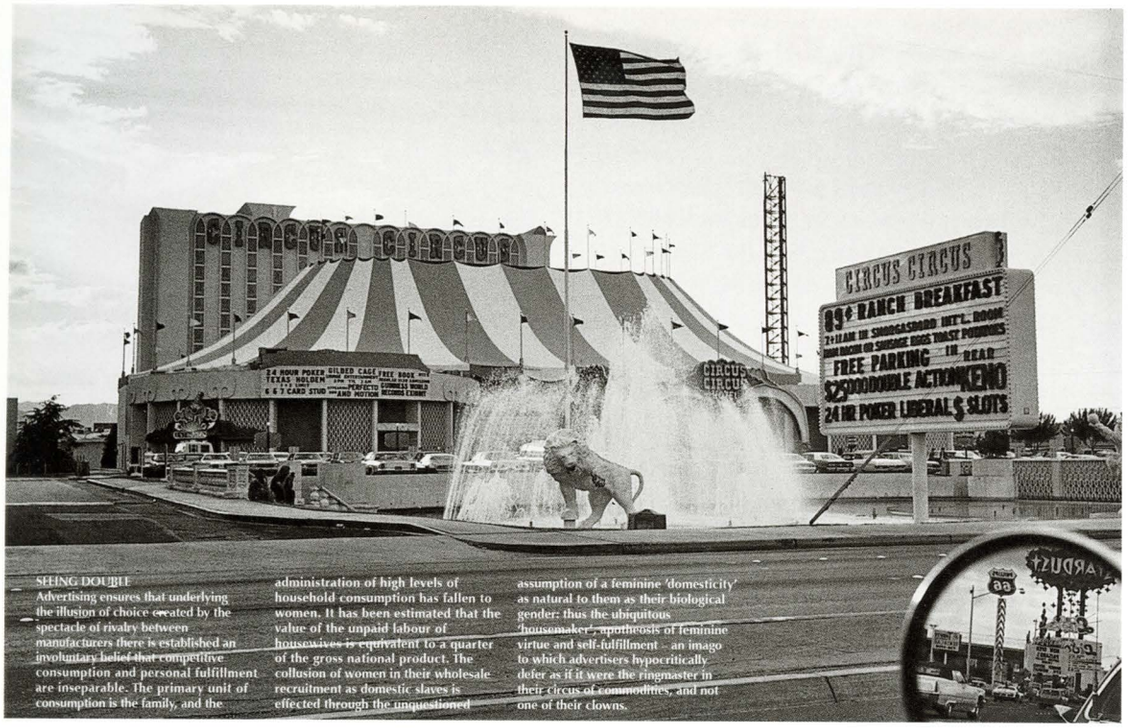
Such historical consciousness was in part a sign of the times. Photography was coming of age as an artistic medium, with a complex and venerable past to draw upon and contend with. We should not fall into the easy postmodern trap of presuming America was becoming pure copy, and that every attempt to depict it is merely a photograph of a photograph. In the 1980s the philosopher and photographer Jean Baudrillard remarked of the country that "everything is destined to reappear as simulation," that "things seem only to exist by virtue of this strange destiny," and that Disneyland is there to convince us that the rest of America is not Disneyland.[30] The presumption that this is a nation flooded with hyper-real fakes and facsimiles, populated by citizens who cannot tell what is what, is misconceived. The condition is more profound: perhaps more than any other nation, modern America was and is a restart, a remake, a second attempt, a project, and, most important perhaps, a work in progress. The American experiment is ongoing. It is in a state of constant becoming and thus needs to be monitored. As a result, the country has a more sovereign and integral relation to self-image. America is not so much out there to be pictured, or even out there *as* a picture; rather, the act of picturing is a primary act of diagnosis, definition, and self-assertion. Each new image and each new photographic project adds to the existing mix a new proposal of identity and value.

This is why America is so interested in what "American" might mean. Every utterance of the word *American* evokes the idealism of the nation's founding, however unattainable. We see this even in the titles of so many of its key photographic projects, most of which have been road trips in one form or another. There is an unbroken thread that runs from Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938) to Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958/9), Stephen Shore's *American Surfaces* (1972), Jacob Holdt's *American Pictures* (1977), Joel Sternfeld's *American Prospects* (1987), Paul Graham's *American Night* (2003), right up to Doug Rickard's *A New American Picture* (2010). Each one American, certainly, but not definitively so (whatever the photographers' intentions at the time). Did Evans imply that his photography was somehow American, or his subject matter, or both? Was his book a statement of fact or a provocation? Do subsequent "American" projects reject and replace older ones, or do they modify or allegorize them? They are all sincere acts of intervention, heartfelt attempts to check and keep open the idea of what the country is or could be. What could be more American than the capacity of its commentators to be bravely attentive to the nation's shortcomings?



OPPOSITE:
JOEL STERNFELD,
MATANUSKA GLACIER, MATANUSKA VALLEY, ALASKA, JULY 1984

RIGHT:
MITCH EPSTEIN,
MIAMI BEACH I, FLORIDA, 1976



VICTOR BURGIN,
SEEING DOUBLE, 1977

MESSAGES FROM THE INTERIOR

Photographers continue to make vital statements about what America is, and they continue to do it on the move. But the distinctions between the open road "out there" and the open roads of the imagination, of memory, or even of the collective archive have become less easy to define. Or more precisely, it has become increasingly apparent that they were always inseparable. Older ideas of *physical* space being separate from the mental, *psychical* space of memory and projection strike many image-makers as misleading and unhelpful. For example, when the British artist Victor Burgin crossed the continent to make his prescient image-text series *US77* (above), it was with the knowledge that every encounter with a landscape or cityscape is filtered through a tangle of preconceptions—aesthetic, intellectual, social, political. These come from the mass media, but also literature, art history, and photography (Burgin was working through the influence of Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander). He turns this filtering into the very subject of his work so that what is discovered on the road is not the United States "as such," but America as a state of mind that is layered and contradictory. Burgin's use of text serves to interrupt and divert the hardened conventions of road trip imagery into a field that is more "theoretical," but also more openly associable with imagery than we find elsewhere in the culture.

Photography, a medium once so vital to the rationalized scientific mapping of the continent seems to have been transformed into a means to map unconscious or preconscious ideas of space and nation. The frontier was becoming as much internal as external. This is not to say that travel becomes irrelevant. Far from it: the road trip remains vital precisely because American spatial discovery and mental discovery, selfhood and nationhood, are so intertwined.

Beginning in 2004, the New York photographer Ryan McGinley took to the road several times with groups of young people in order to make improvised, collaborative images in the wilds of nature. Living together in unfamiliar places, the group develops an intimacy and relaxed sense of theater. This is the Facebook generation, comfortable with displays of private moments and yet ever more reliant upon images for a sense of self. Equally playful but more obvisouly conceptual is The Great Unreal, by Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs. Their project shows us just how well photography can cope with the switch between America "out there" and the imagined America. Many of their images document real spaces but theatricalize them with absurd scenarios and comic interventions. A circular toy road goes nowhere out on the very real plains. The yellow median line of a highway continues down the rock face over the edge of a landslide. These are absurdist gags, but they draw our attention to the habits of perception that frame our expectations of the American landscape. Only by breaking those habits—with humor or irony or surprise —will we get the new American landscape we need. Even the more classically minded contemporary photographers are unavoidably knowing on this matter, but in different ways. Vanessa Winship's series *She Dances on Jackson* (2013, opposite), Alec Soth's *Sleeping by the Mississippi* (2004), and Justine Kurland's annual road

VANESSA WINSHIP,
DEER ON HIGHWAY EMBANKMENT,
BUFFALO, NEW YORK, 2012

trips with her young son are lyric documentaries fully aware that to even set out on the road with a camera is to summon a well-established history of American photography. The challenge is to add to it and remain true to what is new in one's experience.

THE ENDLESS ROAD?

We began with visual maps, the *Photo-Auto Guides* of 1906–10, published at the onset of the nation's love affair with the car. We end a century later with another kind of map of American mobility, one that has emerged from a love affair with, or dependency upon the screen. Google Street View, the ever-growing survey of the world's roads and their surroundings, is a further point on a trajectory that began at the first meeting of the camera and the automobile, and continues into an unknown future. We want to know what the untraveled road looks like, where the paths not taken may lead. Doug Rickard is one of a number of artists to make use of Google Street View. He also shows a keen interest in its kinship with the history of photography and the road trip. Framing chance scenes from small towns to give them new significance, he shoots his computer screen with a 35 mm film camera, the classical equipment of the photographer on the hunt. The digital and the analogue worlds combine. In his extended project A New American Picture (opposite) we can sense echoes from every phase of the history of the road trip. All is here, from the early thrills of what a new technology can show of familiar and strange subjects, to the existential crises, the euphoric interludes, the unexpected moments of poetic grace, and the *unknown*. And while we may never again become lost in America in the geographic sense, photography of the open road remains as disorienting, unpredictable, and compelling as it ever was.

DOUG RICKARD
#83.016417, DETROIT, MI (2009), 2010
#26.688235, BELLE GLADE, FL (2008), 2010

ENDNOTES

1 Stephen Shore, "1947," in *A Road Trip Journal* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008), p. 199.

2 For accounts of the automobile in America in the first half of the twentieth century, see Norman Bel Geddes, *Magic Motorways* (New York: Random House, 1940); Ulrich Keller, *The Highway as Habitat: A Roy Stryker Documentation, 1943–1955* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: University Art Museum, 1986); Peter J. Ling, *America and the Automobile: Technology, Reform and Social Change, 1893–1923* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990).

3 Founder Gardner S. Chapin sold Photo-Auto to the map publisher Rand McNally in 1907.

4 Such titles include E. O. Hoppé, *Die Vereinigten Staaten: Das romantische Amerika; Baukunst, Landschaft, und Volksleben* (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1927), also published as *Romantic America* (New York: B. Westermann Company, 1927).

5 Marshall McLuhan in Willem L. Oltmans, ed., *On Growth* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1974), p. 51.

6 [James Agee], "The Great American Roadside," *Fortune*, September 1934, pp. 53–63, 172, 174, 177. Agee was not credited for the essay.

7 One of the photographs illustrating Agee's essay was Walker Evans's shot of a humble tourist camp cabin. This was the beginning of a unique pairing of talents but it was no collaboration: Agee and Evans met the following year.

8 [Agee], "The Great American Roadside," p. 56.

9 Ibid., p. 60.

10 Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, "Amerikanskie fotografii," *Ogonek* 11–17 and 19–23 (1936). A book of the project was also published in the Soviet Union and America but with no photographs. See Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *Odnoetazhnaia Amerika* (Single-Storied America) (Moscow: Khudzhestvennaia literatura, 1937) and *Little Golden America: Two Famous Soviet Humorists Survey these United States* (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart, 1937). In 2007 the photographs and an English translation of the original articles were brought together in Erika Wolf, ed., *Ilf and Petrov's American Road Trip: The 1935 Travelogue of Two Soviet Writers* (New York: Cabinet Books/Princeton Architectural Press, 2007).

11 Introduction to "Man Made America," special issue of *Architectural Review* 108, no. 648 (December 1950): pp. 338–39.

12 The key photographers working for Stryker's Standard Oil project were Charlotte Brooks, Esther Bubley, John Collier, Jr., Harold Corsini, Arnold Eagle, Russell Lee, Sol Libsohn, Gordon Parks, Edwin and Louise Rosskam, Charles Rotkin, John Vachon, and Todd Webb.

13 See Ulrich Keller's excellent study of this project, *The Highway as Habitat: A Roy Stryker Documentation, 1943–1955* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: University Art Museum, 1986). Standard Oil had a dubious presence in Germany between the wars and was somewhat involved in the fuelling of the Nazi war machine. The photographic project was in part an attempt at rehabilitation.

14 Walt Whitman titled a poem in *Leaves of Grass* "Song of the Open Road."

15 Edward Weston, letter to Beaumont Newhall and Nancy Newhall, April 28, 1941, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Collection, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona.

16 John Malcolm Brinnin, cited in Agnés Sire and Jean-François Chevrier, eds., *Photographing America: Henri Cartier-Bresson/Walker Evans, 1929–1947* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), p. 15.

17 Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, in collaboration with Éditions Verve, Paris, 1952). The book was laid out in Paris by Tériade, the founder of Éditions Verve, which published the book in France. Sixty-four of Cartier-Bresson's Manhattan photographs had appeared three years prior in Daniel Wronecki's celebratory book *New York* (Paris: F. Nathan, 1949), however, they give little sense of the photographer's grasp of America.

18 Years later Cartier-Bresson confessed: "If it had not been for the challenge of the work of Walker Evans, I don't think I would have remained a photographer." A few of Cartier-Bresson's images do recall *American Photographs*, but what he took from Evans was what so many photographers took: the courage to grasp America as an ever more unwieldy, contradictory whole. Evans published a review of Cartier-Bresson's *Decisive Moment* but he made no reference to the American sequence. See Walker Evans, "Cartier-Bresson: A True Man of the Eye," *New York Times*, October 19, 1952. Reprinted in David Campany, *Walker Evans: The Magazine Work* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), pp. 216–17.

19 The meandering Route 1 has been largely replaced by Interstate 95.

20 Jack Kerouac, *On the Road: The Original Scroll* (New York: Viking, 2007), p. 190.

21 Robert Frank, "Interview at Wellesley College" (1977) in Eugenia Parry Janis and Wendy MacNeil, eds., *Photography within the Humanities* (Danbury, N. Hamp.: Addison House, 1977).

22 Robert Frank, application for a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, October 21, 1954. Frank received a second grant from the foundation in 1956.

23 Many others have continued the analogy with jazz. See, for example, Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984); and Gerry Badger, "The Indecisive Moment: The 'Stream of Consciousness' Photobook," in *The Photobook: A History, Volume I*, Martin Parr and Gerry Badger (London: Phaidon, 2004).

24 Roland Barthes, "The New Citroën" (1956), in *Mythologies* (1957; New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 88–90. Barthes was prompted to write by the arrival of the Citroën DS, its streamlined curves reminiscent of American designs of the era.

25 Walker Evans, "These Dark Satanic Mills," *Fortune*, April 1955, pp. 139–46.

26 "The Highway as a Killer," *Life*, May 30, 1969, pp. 24–35.

27 Several more books detailing chronic car dependence appeared soon after. See A. Q. Mowbray, *Road to Ruin* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969); Helen Leavitt, *Superhighway-Superhoax* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970); Kenneth R. Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind: An Analysis of Tyranny, a Proposal for Rebellion, a Plan for Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 1971); and John Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile: The Fatal Effect of the Golden Era, 1955–1970* (New York: Norton, 1972).

28 Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: or, What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 27.

29 Joshua C. Taylor, *America as Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

30 Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 32. See also Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

STORE
CELL PHONE
GROCERY

ROBERT FRANK

The Americans

1955 – 1956

Robert Frank came to America from Switzerland in 1947. Initially he worked as a fashion photographer for *Harper's Bazaar*, the magazine art directed by Alexey Brodovitch, who was a great supporter of progressive photography. By 1953, Frank was becoming a close friend and protegé of Walker Evans, accompanying and assisting him on projects for *Fortune* magazine, while producing his own increasingly subjective photo-essays. Like Evans, Frank was fascinated by America but troubled by its vanities, its self-deceptions, its racial divides, and its ever-increasing love of money. In 1955, he applied to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for a fellowship. His statement of intent was broad:

To photograph freely throughout the United States, using the miniature camera exclusively . . . This project is essentially the visual study of a civilization . . . but it is only partly documentary in nature: one of its aims is more artistic than the word documentary implies . . . What I have in mind then, is observation and record of what one naturalized American finds to see in the United States that signifies the kind of civilization born here and spreading elsewhere. . . . I speak of the things that are there, anywhere and everywhere—easily found, not easily selected and interpreted.

When the application was successful, Frank bought a 1950 Ford Business Coupe. He planned an expansive trip with help from the Automobile Association and advice from Evans. For eight months, Frank was on the road from New York to San Francisco; from Butte, Montana, to Miami Beach. Sometimes he travelled alone, sometimes with his young family. By May 1956, he had exposed nearly eight hundred rolls of 35 mm film, the majority processed and contact printed along the way.

In the course of making prints, Frank was able to see his themes and motifs more clearly: popular culture, music, religion, the hollow mass media, racial tensions, class tensions, and the all-encompassing obsession with the automobile. The goal was always to make a book, and he laid out his initial sequence. At the end of 1957, a folio of thirty-three images appeared in *U.S. Camera Annual*, bookended by statements from Walker Evans and Frank himself. Evans described Frank's vision as "positive, large, and basically generous," but also ironic, detached, bracing, and stinging: "a far cry from all the woolly, successful 'photo-sentiments' about human familyhood; from the mindless pictorial sales-talk around fashionable, guilty, and therefore bogus heartfeeling." Frank noted how "life for a photographer cannot be a matter of indifference. Opinion often consists of a kind of criticism. But criticism can come out of love. It is important to see what is invisible to others. Perhaps the look of hope or the look of sadness. Also, it is always the instantaneous reaction to oneself that produces a photograph."

With the support of publisher Robert Delpire, the book was issued as *Les Américains* in France in 1958. The photographs alternated with extracts of writings on America by various authors past and present. The following year, Frank convinced Grove Press of New York to publish it without the texts. Grove championed experimental writers from Europe and America, notably Jack Kerouac, who wrote an introduction to *The Americans*, placing it firmly in the freewheeling spirit of the Beat generation.

The book's reception was mixed, but always extreme. Supporters saw a melancholy lament from a highly attuned observer who had found a way to show the flimsiness of America's official image of confidence, comfort, and equality. Critics saw little more than Communist propaganda. Even the bookshop at the Museum of Modern Art refused to stock it at first. A decade later, the museum's new director John Szarkowski recognized that the pictures that "took us by ambush then" had now become essential for the understanding of both America and photography.

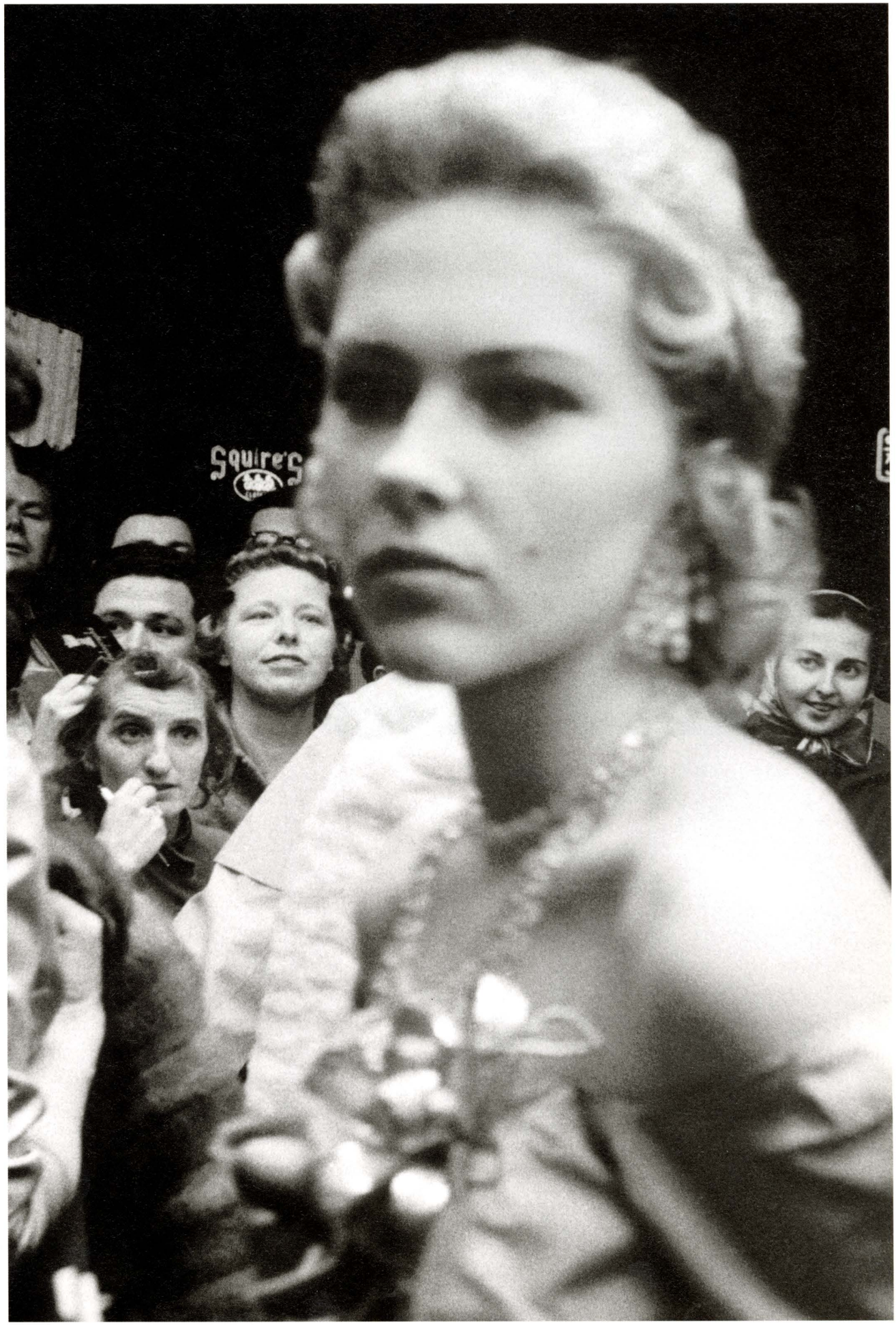
Frank had exploded the medium, pushing the black-and-white 35 mm frame to extremes of observation and expression. For a generation of independent photographers, his became the dominant idiom for the depiction of America. The imitators were countless, but others were inspired to extend what Frank had begun. For some however, it was an unsurpassable peak, the supreme work of the right photographer at the right time and place. So *The Americans* also prompted the search for very different visual strategies: color, larger and slower formats, overt staging, combinations of images and text. But the central question has remained: how is a photographic statement about America to be made?

ROBERT FRANK,
TROLLEY—NEW ORLEANS, 1955

ROBERT FRANK,
CANAL STREET, NEW ORLEANS, 1955

ROBERT FRANK,
PARADE—HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY, 1955

ROBERT FRANK,
MOVIE PREMIER–HOLLYWOOD, 1956


Squire's

ROBERT FRANK,
VIEW FROM HOTEL WINDOW,
BUTTE, MONTANA, 1956

ROBERT FRANK,
CAR ACCIDENT—U.S. 66, BETWEEN WINSLOW AND FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA, 1955

ROBERT FRANK,
BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1955

ED RUSCHA

Twentysix Gasoline Stations

1962

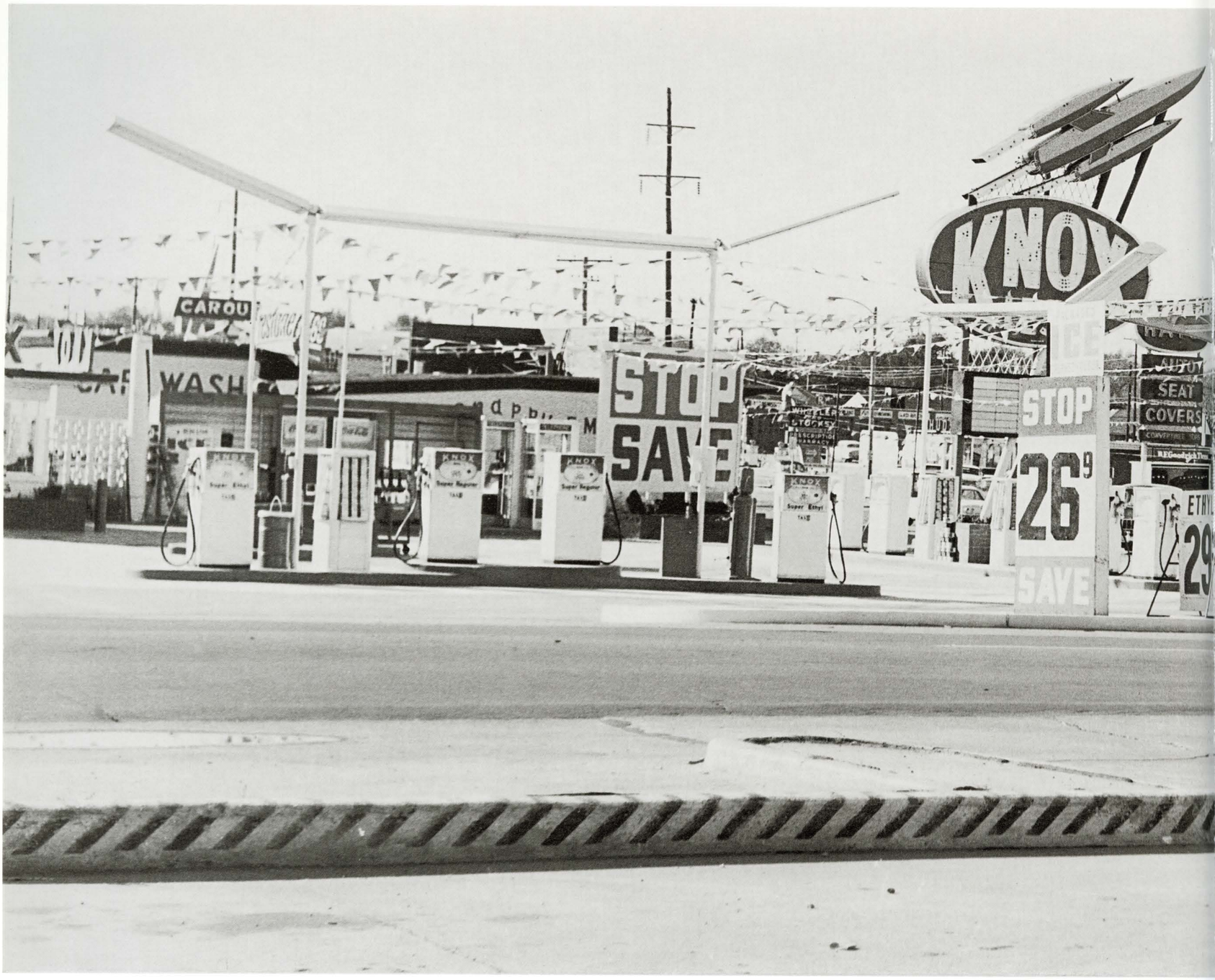
No architectural form has better expressed America's social, economic, and ecological development than the gas station. From his home in Los Angeles, the young Ed Ruscha would return a few times a year to Oklahoma City, where he had grown up in the 1940s and '50s. In 1962, he was driving along the old Route 66 when, as he later recalled, he "had a brainstorm in the middle of the night to do this little book called *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*." Passing through Kingman, Flagstaff, Williams, Albuquerque, and Amarillo with his Yashica twin lens camera, he would pull up opposite the familiar gas stations—UNION. TEXACO. STANDARD. CONOCO. Beneath the tall signs were simple box-shaped buildings with huge forecourts.

Ruscha framed them simply, in the middle distance. It was perfunctory subject matter, recorded perfunctorily. Some have called it "deadpan" or "deskilled." Ruscha saw his pictures as "an extension of Marcel Duchamp's Readymade in photographic form." Their style, or anti-style, made them look as if they might have been real estate photos or snapshots found and reused. No poetry, no expression, no comment, just plain visual statements. "The photography by itself doesn't mean anything to me; it's the gas station that's the important thing."

But there was nothing casual about Ruscha's work, especially his making of the book. "Even though I didn't know exactly what I wanted, I knew a lot of things I didn't want. I didn't want something that was dramatic or sentimental. I just wanted something factual, something that wouldn't distract from the simple, physical economy of the book itself... I liked the word *Gasoline* and I liked the specific quality of 'twentysix.'" He went through several designs before ending up with simple red graphics that echoed highway signage. The photos were laid out in almost geographic sequence, from west to east. Ruscha saw photography as a graphic art, inseparable from mass production, the printed page, and language. Published in April 1963 in an edition of four hundred, his slim paperback was baffling. "I realized for the first time that this book had an inexplicable thing I was looking for, and that was a kind of 'huh?'" He took out a little ad in *Artforum* magazine to boast that even the Library of Congress had rejected it. In the half century since its publication it has come to be seen as a key work of Pop art and an early landmark of Conceptual art.

Ruscha went on to make a dozen books in this vein. While none featured automobiles directly, there is always a roaming gaze surveying the monotonous look of California and the West. For *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967), he commissioned an aerial photographer to shoot all the empty lots he could find. *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) is a foldout panoramic tracking shot. *Royal Road Test* (made with Mason Williams and Patrick Blackwell in 1967) records in forensic detail the wreckage of a typewriter thrown from a moving car hurtling through the desert. *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965) and *A Few Palm Trees* (1971) highlight the typical roadside backdrop of a city whose repetitive spread was made possible by the automobile. "In a car, things seem to blur together—another stucco apartment and *whoosh*—you've past it . . . to me it's part of a big stage set to be sorted out. I would imagine myself as a reporter on an assignment. My assignment was to bring back something that I didn't think anyone else had seen." Perhaps we cannot "see" such everyday things unless they are photographed.

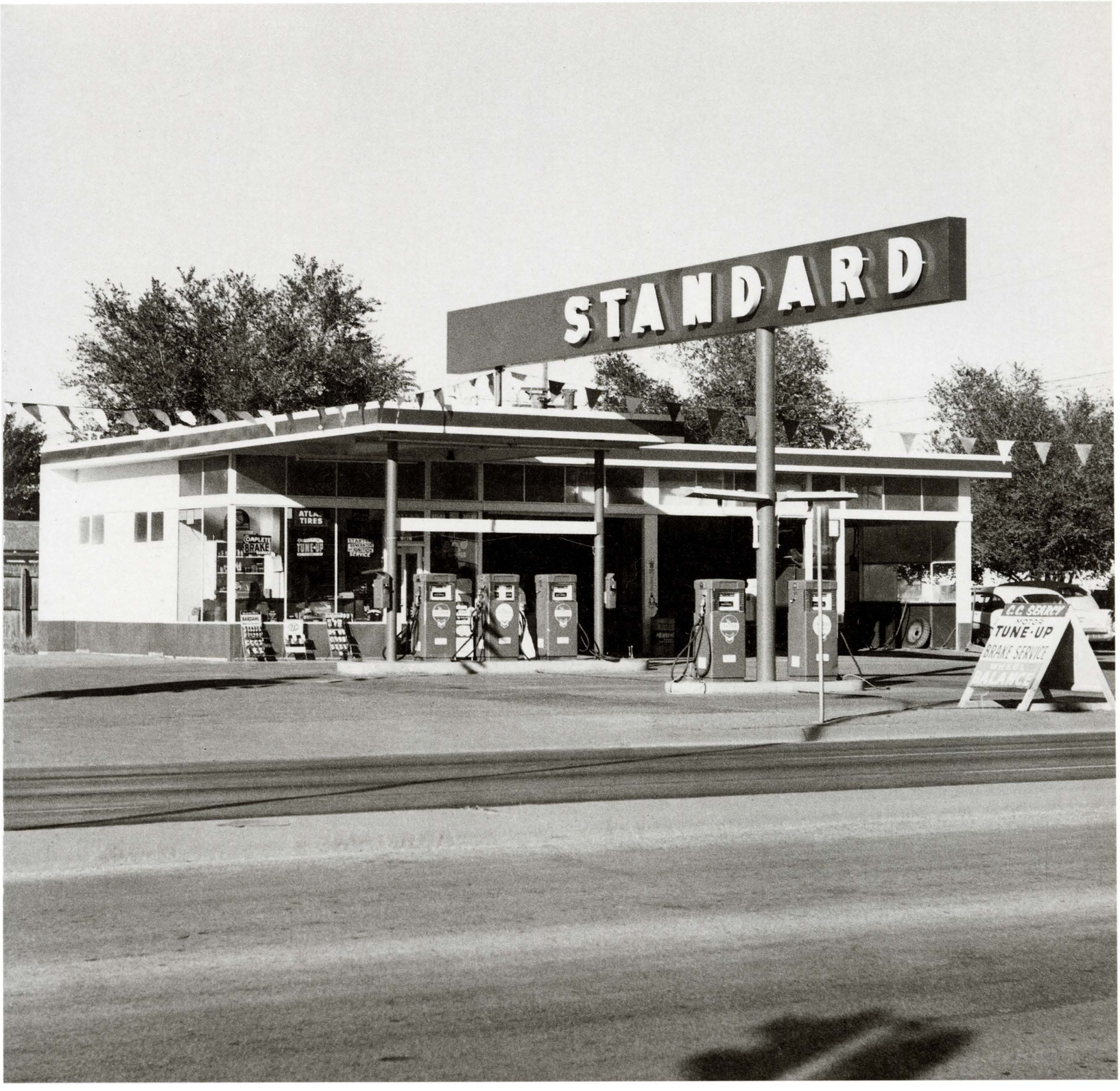
ED RUSCHA,
PHILLIPS 66, FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA, 1962



ED RUSCHA,
KNOX LESS, OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA, 1962

STOP
SAVE
26
Via Roma
PIZZA

ED RUSCHA,
TEXACO, VEGA, TEXAS, 1962



ED RUSCHA,
STANDARD STATION, AMARILLO, TEXAS, 1962

INGE MORATH

The Road to Reno

1960

Before becoming a photojournalist the Austrian Inge Morath was a correspondent and then an editor for the Munich-based *Heute* magazine. In 1949, Robert Capa invited her to join the Magnum Photo Agency as an editor-researcher. Studying Henri Cartier-Bresson's contact sheets as they arrived on the Magnum desk was a great influence. Morath soon developed her own similarly unobtrusive, lightly surreal, and deceptively simple photographic style. In 1955, she became a Magnum photographer in her own right and travelled internationally. Making copious notes and captions as she went, her writing and photography evolved together.

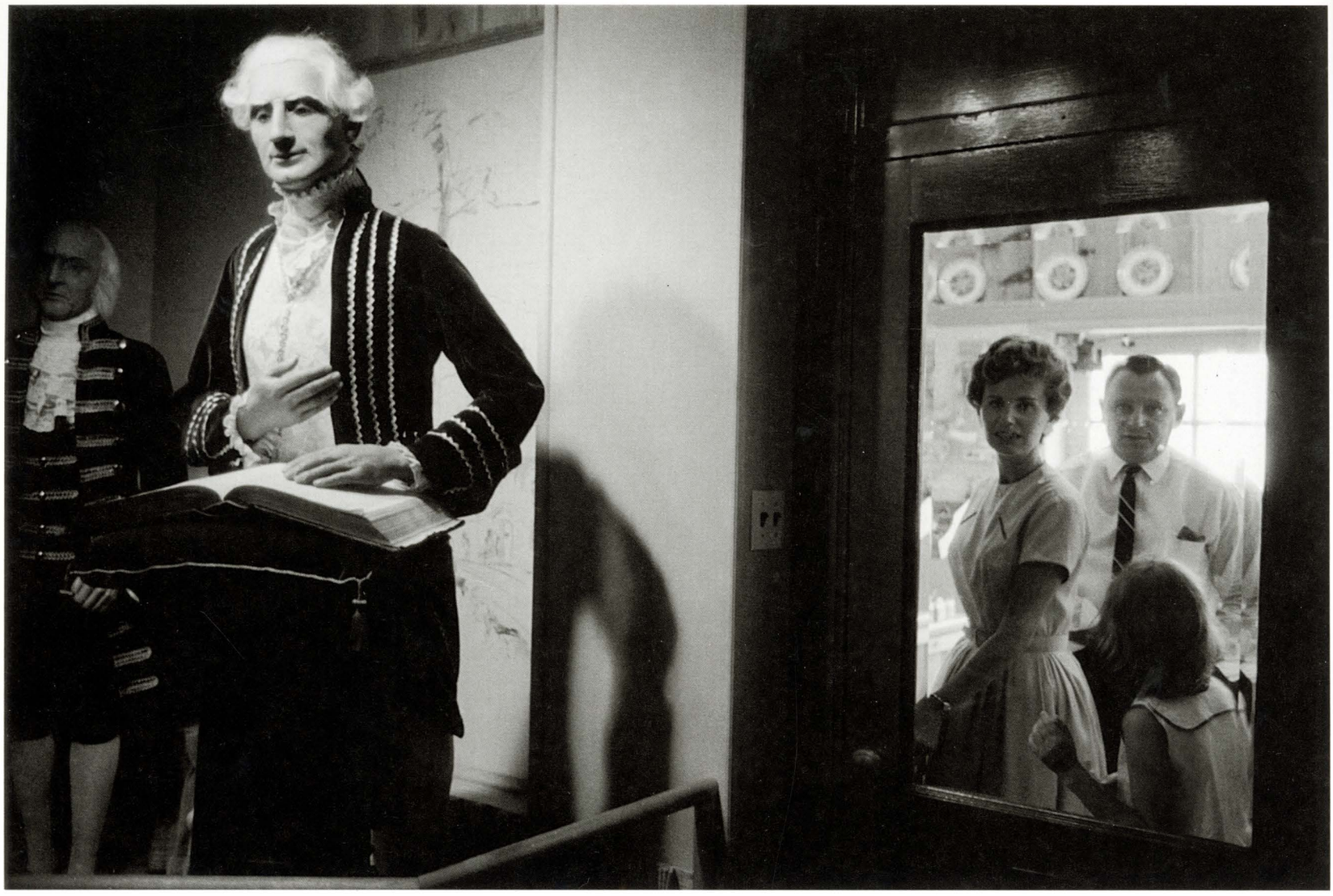
In 1960, Morath was one of nine Magnum photographers invited to the outskirts of Reno, Nevada, to document the making of John Huston's film *The Misfits*. On July 1, she left New York by car with Henri Cartier-Bresson. In addition to her cameras, she took her typewriter. They drove a southern route via Harrisburg, Gettysburg, Memphis, Albuquerque, Gallup, Flagstaff, and Las Vegas—eighteen days on the road.

Although Morath had travelled widely, America perplexed her. She found it a challenge to get past the obvious: the landscapes of inhuman scale, dotted with the all too human flotsam of signage, commerce, and limited cuisine. "I cannot penetrate the spirit. . . . It is not for outsiders," she wrote. Morath was at heart a photographer of human intimacy, less interested in the irony or exoticism that characterizes so much American roadside photography.

What she typed was "not really a story, they are bits of notes written each night at the table in a motel room that always was in a different place and always looked the same." In her elegant prose, she itemized the daily experiences as they accumulated, complementing her unforced, notational images. The look and taste of food (she resorted to eating apples and carrots, and drinking tea). The feel of sheets and tablecloths. Expressions on the faces of strangers. The hard ground underfoot. The color of neon. The trailer parks and auto junkyards. The perception of the distant horizon. There's no angst or existentialism, no metaphors or metaphysics. Just description. Cartier-Bresson makes a fleeting appearance in front of her camera (the two were having a brief affair), but Morath records the trip as if she is making it alone. It is a humble and solitary reaction to an overwhelmingly new world. She arrived in Reno on July 18, just as Huston began his shoot. The project was never published in Morath's lifetime, but she left annotated contact sheets and a file of typed pages.

INGE MORATH,
RENO, NEVADA, 1960

INGE MORATH,
OUTSIDE MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, 1960



July 1.

From Harrisburg to Gettysburg to Harper's Ferry to a motel on Road 340 on the way to the Shenandoah National Park.

Amazing, this first getting in touch with the history of the United States. In Harrisburg it doesn't quite yet happen. Gettysburg is more exciting. The same narrow streets, even prettier old houses. Then something called the Hall of Presidents. Our group is let into a room filled with waxen figures by the ladies who collect the ten cents entrance fee and tell us that everything works automatically. A voice starts to speak behind a statue and the light on top of its head lights up. It turns out to be the first president, George Washington. He talks about himself and his achievements. Briefly. So did all the other presidents after him. They were mostly standing; only a couple could sit and their chests looked awfully hollow.

INGE MORATH,
(ABOVE) *GEORGE WASHINGTON, HALL OF PRESIDENTS, GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA*, 1960

(OPPOSITE) *CHEROKEE VILLAGE, NORTH CAROLINA, A FAVORITE TOURIST ATTRACTION*, 1960

DAIRY QUEEN
TS
The COFFEE Shop
Sealtest ICE CREAM
Kodak Film

INGE MORATH,
(LEFT) *OCONALUFTEE VILLAGE, NORTH CAROLINA*, 1960

(OPPOSITE) *CHEROKEE VILLAGE, NORTH CAROLINA*, 1960

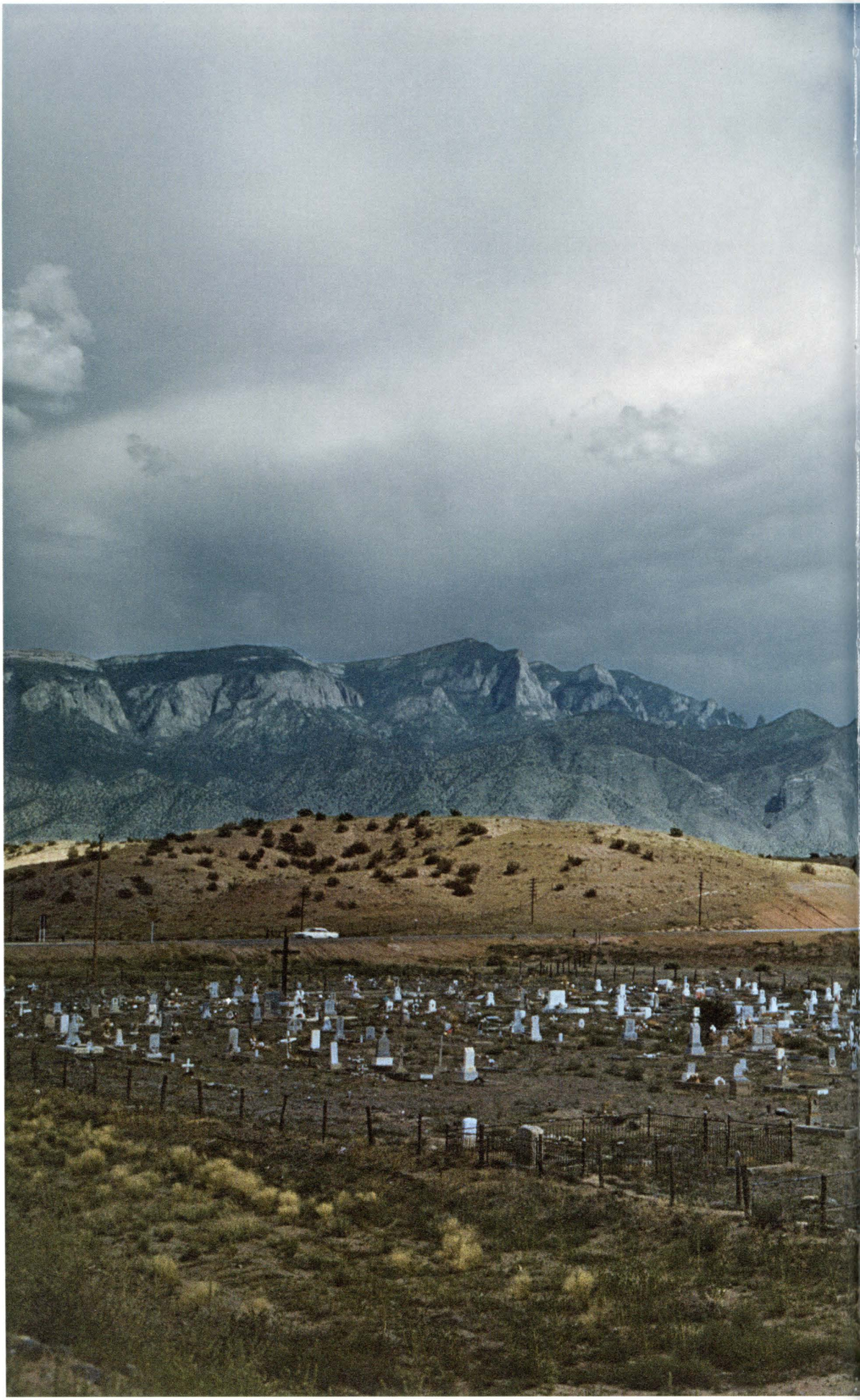
July 6.

Children troop behind their parents, the father watches the mothers admire the expensive quilts and the youngsters proudly sweat under Indian feather headdresses. A stream of cars comes and goes, and when I start feeling that this is the normal atmosphere for a holiday resort I scram and go to Oconaluftee, which is supposed to be a reconstructed Cherokee village where the Indians still live and do as tradition has had them do a while ago.

It is a guided tour and a very beautiful young man in a leather loincloth and a string of pretty beads collects our tickets. Then our group just walks from one hut to the other and in each hut a serious figure sits and gathers up beads or weaves or carves or makes a canoe and another figure next to it explains in English why and how. It is all very sweet and everybody listens attentively and it takes forty-five minutes.

INGE MORATH,
CHEROKEE VILLAGE, NORTH CAROLINA, 1960

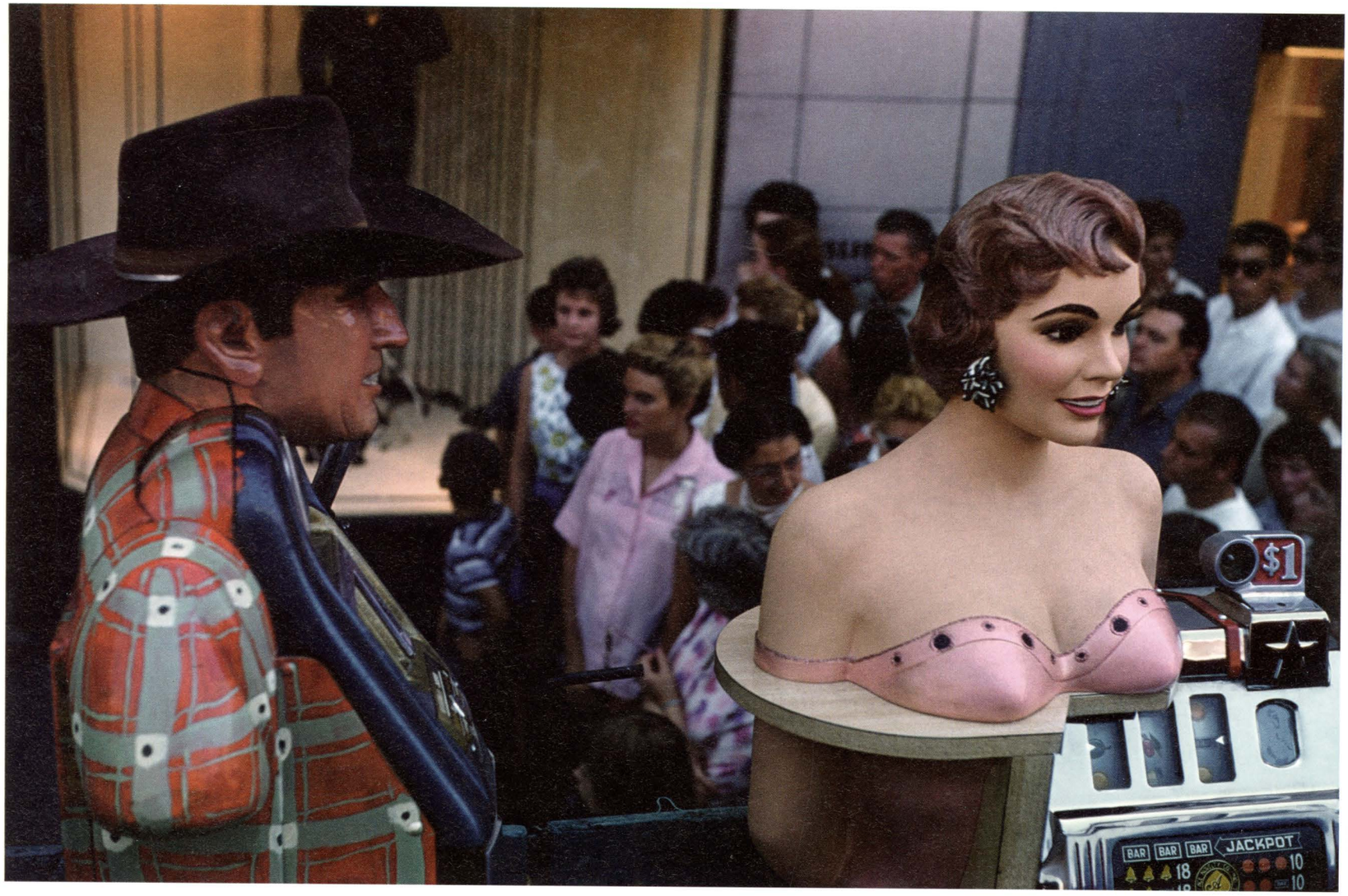
INGE MORATH,
HIGHWAY ENTERTAINMENT AT AN INDIAN TRADING POST BEFORE ARRIVING AT ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO, 1960



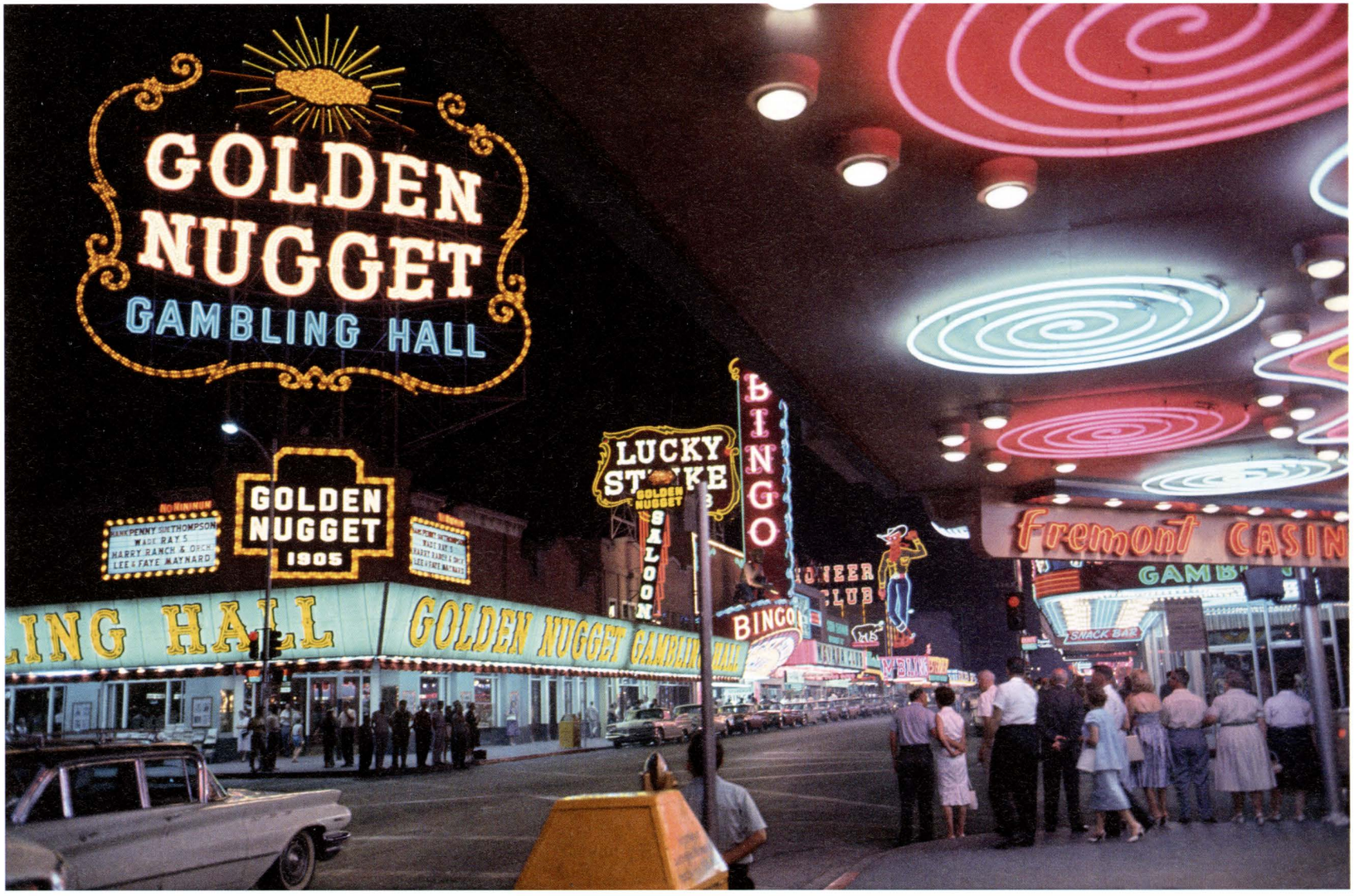
INGE MORATH,
INDIAN CEMETERY NEAR ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO, 1960

INGE MORATH,
HITCHHIKERS ON THE ROAD FROM ALBUQUERQUE TO GALLUP, NEW MEXICO, 1960

INGE MORATH,
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS, CLOSED LUNCH COUNTER. IN THIS TOWN, LIKE IN MOST PARTS OF THE SOUTH OF THE U.S., WHITES REFUSE TO SERVE NEGRO CUSTOMERS; NEGROES STAGE SIT-IN STRIKES, 1960



INGE MORATH,
RENO, NEVADA, 1960

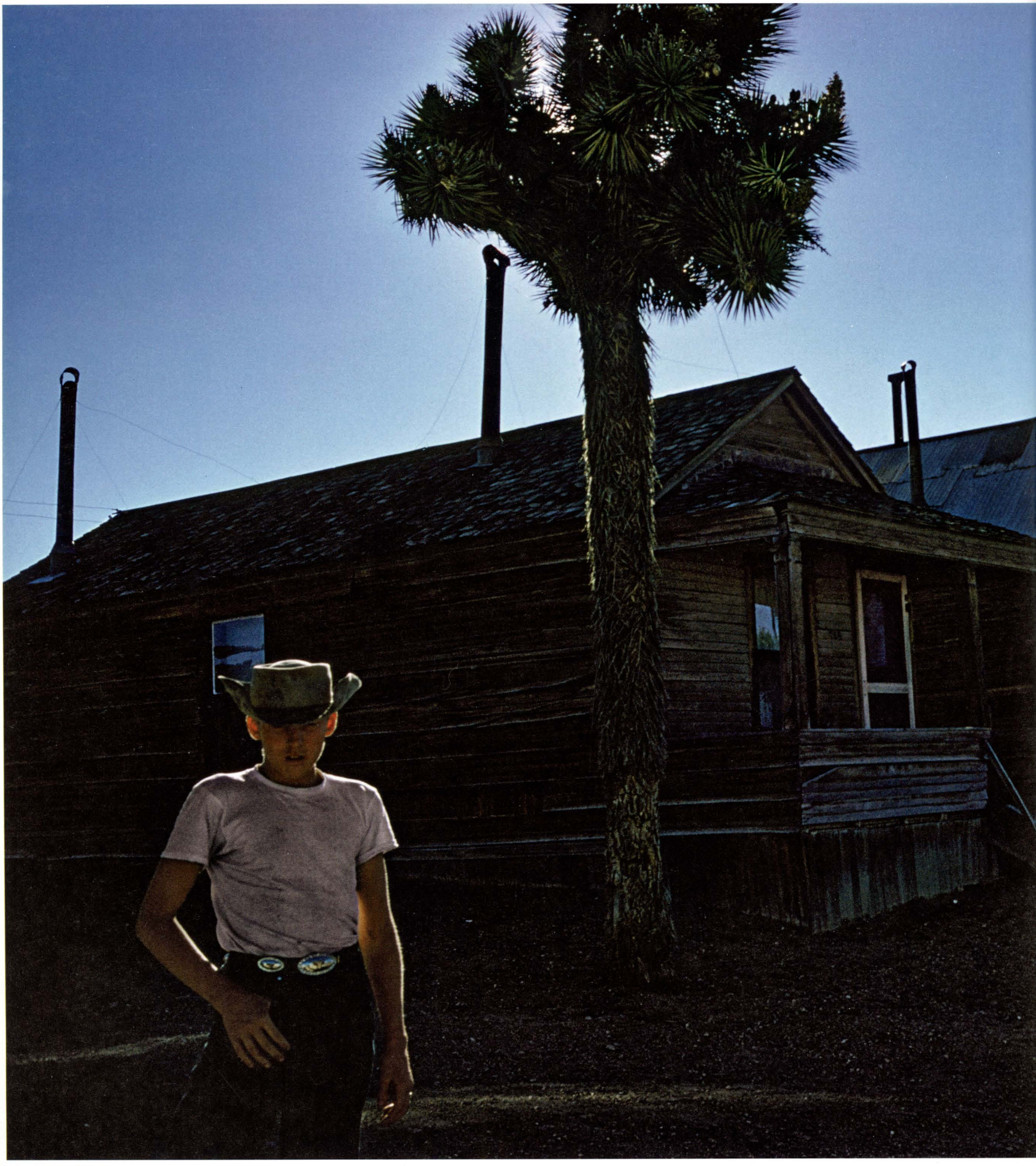


INGE MORATH,
GOLDEN NUGGET, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, 1960

July 15. Friday.

Practically nothing announces the approach of one of the most extraordinary places I was to see on this trip, grown out of barbaric desires to gamble and gain and forget, Las Vegas suddenly receives you, wearing stage makeup in full daylight with the sophistication of a ham actor in an ambulant road show. The magnificent setting of this highly perishable world of a few boulevards, expensive hotels, motels, slot machines, chemin de Fer tables and chorus girls is the desert. Las Vegas spills you out into it again just a few minutes after you have left its main boulevard and one wonders how long it would take this sand to cover it all up, this heat to dry it all out.

The interior of my motel is madly luxurious, the swimming pool is larger than usual and its shape odder. Over the entrance untiring neon signs in the shapes of flamingos and horses and pointing cowboys bravely fight against the sun. I sleep for an hour because a Las Vegas night should be long.



Two hours later I arrive in Goldfield. There is another main street that looks like the main streets in many small towns, except maybe that it is stiller. I stopped the car next to a huge billboard on which a Davy Crockett and a red Indian held up two pages of a huge book that told Goldfield's history and made, at the same time, some discreet advertising for Harold's Club in Reno. It said, in brief, that Goldfield got terribly rich somewhere between 1902 and 1910, when the population ran to thirty thousand and the yearly mining production to 11 million dollars. It does not say why and how all this disappeared. I walked into a small café to find out more. Inside, wallpaper with faded flowers and some framed photographs of miners posing for group pictures in front of their shafts. The woman said that she had only come to Goldfield a few months ago from Michigan. People still go out West in this amazing continent of a country, they leave Michigan to come to the dead dreams of Goldfield. Will she stay? She does not know. She does not seem to be unhappy about all this, or even unsettled. One has to try one's chance, and there are many places to go to.

Her son appears, tall and thin in blue jeans, sweatshirt, and a very old gray Western hat, stains round the headband. He confirms that the casino is a really good one, and suggests that we should have lunch there. As he sees my curiosity about Goldfield's history, he offers to guide me through the abandoned mining town.

We arrived at a row of wooden houses, some still had windows and doors, even a chair on the porch, torn stuffing limply hanging over its sides. Steps still led up to wooden porches overshadowed by a row of three palm trees. Inside, it was more frightening, more unreal, because the slowness of the self-destruction of objects gives them a recently abandoned yet remote aspect: the ceilings peeled off over the flowered wallpaper, liquid dried out in bottles abandoned on a table, chairs left standing to fall to dust in the position from which the last person hastily got up from them, mattresses are still on beds, mirrors over simple dressing tables, photographs in frames.

INGE MORATH,
GOLDFIELD, NEVADA, 1960

GARRY WINOGRAND

1964

1964

Garry Winogrand had been a professional photographer since the early 1950s, shooting advertising, sports, and editorial assignments to support his young family. Such work stretched neither his talent nor the medium. But slowly he began pursuing more personal work. In 1963, some of his photographs were included in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Five Unrelated Photographers*. He felt confident enough to go his own way and take on the USA as his subject matter. Winogrand's big break needed to be financed so he made an application to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for a grant. His statement of intent was honest and deeply heartfelt:

I look at the pictures I have done up to now, and they make me feel that who we are and how we feel and what is to become of us just doesn't matter. Our aspirations and successes have become cheap and petty. I read the newspapers, the columnists, some books, I look at some magazines (our press). They all deal in illusions and fantasies. I can only conclude that we have lost ourselves, and that the bomb may finish the job permanently, and it just doesn't matter, we have not loved life. . . . I cannot accept my conclusions, and so I must continue this photographic investigation further and deeper. This is my project.

He received the grant in 1964 and left New York to drive a slow 1957 Ford Fairlane through fourteen states, "photographing all the time." He recalled: "I saw Walker Evans's *American Photographs* for the first time in 1955. I was planning a slow, zigzagging, across-the-country car trip, to see, and to photograph. The photographs in the book taught me to love photographs and photography, like no other photographs I had seen up to that time."

It was the ambition and the motifs that Winogrand responded to. Evans was measured, melancholy, and distant; the sociable Winogrand was famously manic, and his visual appetite was prodigious. On the road, he committed himself to isolated concentration on his photography. In Los Angeles he met up with Joel Meyerowitz (who was on his own road trip) and the two travelled together to Las Vegas. Winogrand returned home in late October.

Even by his own prolific standards, he had shot an enormous amount of film, half of it in Texas and California. He put 550 rolls through his 35 mm Leicas—mostly black-and-white Tri-X, but also one hundred rolls of Kodachrome color transparency. He made over one thousand prints and a tentative edit of the color material, but no body of work from this period was formulated.

Nevertheless on this trip, Winogrand found what he really wanted to do and plunged into the intense rate of work he maintained until his untimely death in 1984. Some of the images, like those taken at White Sands in New Mexico are poised contemplations of scenes, at once strange and familiar. However, a real breakthrough was made on busy streets. It was here that Winogrand could really explore his extraordinary levels of visual attention. Immersed in the moving world around him he could hold together so many fleeting details in the most unlikely but compelling pictures.

More than anything, he loved to be on the streets photographing. He felt life was not really happening if he was not shooting it. Editing could always wait. He confessed: "I never knew how to make a book. I never figured out how to do it. I have a lot of pictures that just don't make sense as a book. They're just pictures—which is fine too."

Several pictures from 1964 have become signature Winogrands, but for him at least, the year was significant because it marked his formation as an artist with a very particular take on America and how it should be photographed. It was not until 2002 that a posthumous selection was made for a book, titled simply *1964*. It soon redefined the public perception of Winogrand, not least as a consummate colorist.

GARRY WINOGRAND,
WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND,
WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, 1964

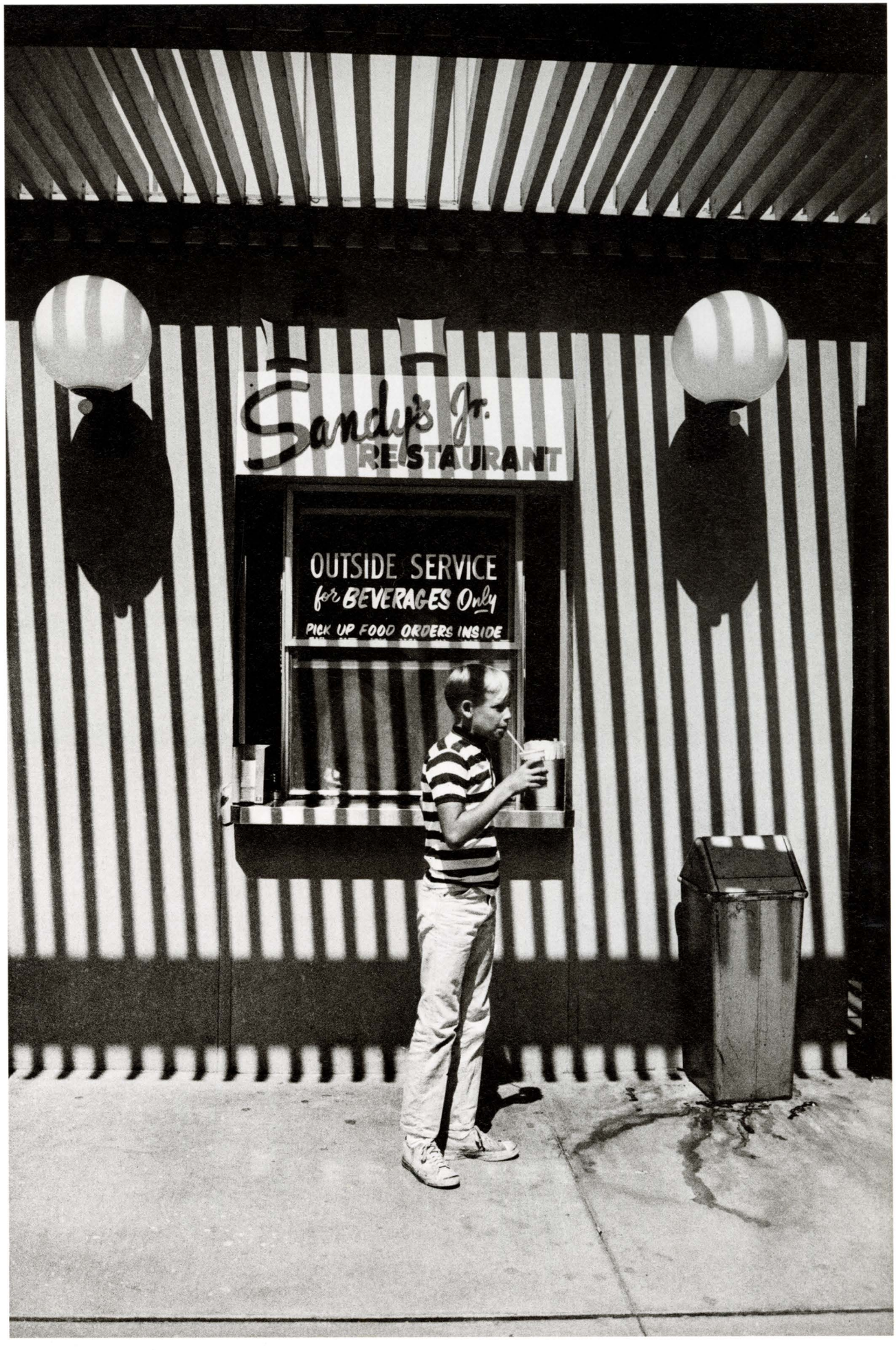
GARRY WINOGRAND, *SAN MARCOS*, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND,
STATE FAIR OF TEXAS, DALLAS, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND, *HOUSTON*, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND, *DEALY PLAZA, DALLAS*, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND,
STATE FAIR OF TEXAS, DALLAS, 1964



GARRY WINOGRAND,
SAN FRANCISCO, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND,
HOUSTON, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND,
LAKE TAHOE, 1964

GARRY WINOGRAND,
WYOMING, 1964

WILLIAM EGGLESTON

Los Alamos

1965 – 1974

On a sunny day in 1966, William Eggleston photographed a grocery boy. Bright, warm light hits his open-mouthed face and starched shirt, glinting off the shopping carts he is tidying away. In the background, a middle-aged woman in sunglasses approaches, while shadows of the boy and Eggleston himself fall upon the receding white wall of the store. At once plain and extraordinary, this image opened Eggleston's life as America's foremost colorist and chronicler of the country's quiet enigmas. It also opened a huge body of work made over the next eight years in the photographer's homeland of Memphis and the Mississippi Delta, across to New Orleans, up to Las Vegas and Southern California.

Over the last three decades, Eggleston's influence on the understanding and appreciation of photography has been wide and profound. Yet this may make it difficult to comprehend the stubborn yet supple originality of his vision. Meanwhile the passing of time has rendered almost exotic his glimpses of common American life in the 1960s and '70s. Cars abound in these photographs, but their appearance is never as obvious at it may appear. When Eggleston saw a '74 Ford Torino parked beneath a billboard of itself, was he thinking (like Walker Evans before him) that automobiles will mark an era as definitively as that year's fashions? Or was he simply enjoying the symphony of greens and yellows in the here and now? Or perhaps the play of image within image? A photograph of a police car at the scene of a road accident is composed as a rectangle of crazed vectors. Is it a document or a psychological portrait of auto-culture? What do we make of the girl and two women, posing for someone else, dwarfed by the front of a car and seemingly sandwiched between its fender, a fence and the flat sea beyond? As so often with Eggleston's work the confidence of the virtuoso composition only serves to unsettle his scene. In fact, the more commonplace the setting, the stranger the effect. The quizzical frown of a silver-haired lady in pink gingham is gently mocked by the rainbow joy of the wall behind her. "It's of a place in Memphis that's long gone," Eggleston recalled, "and I was entranced by what she was wearing—her sweater and dress—and how the color of her lips and fingernails went beautifully with those colors. The wall—those multicolors—is just incidental." Another silver-haired lady, also in pink gingham, sits in a diner with her back to the camera. The view of fancy coiffure is so compelling there's no desire to see her face. It stands as a portrait.

While driving in New Mexico in 1973, passing through the Jemez Mountains, Eggleston came to the National Laboratory of Los Alamos, where the atomic bomb had been developed in great secrecy. He took its name for what was his own private research project. The following year he concluded Los Alamos, a body of around 2,200 images. The idea was to have no captions, no titles, and no specific order, although the images should be shown together. In 1976, the Museum of Modern Art presented a selection from a different body of Eggleston's work. He continued to photograph at a prodigious rate, and Los Alamos slipped from view. When it was partly revealed around 2003, its sudden appearance made the work all the more lucid and evocative.

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS
PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

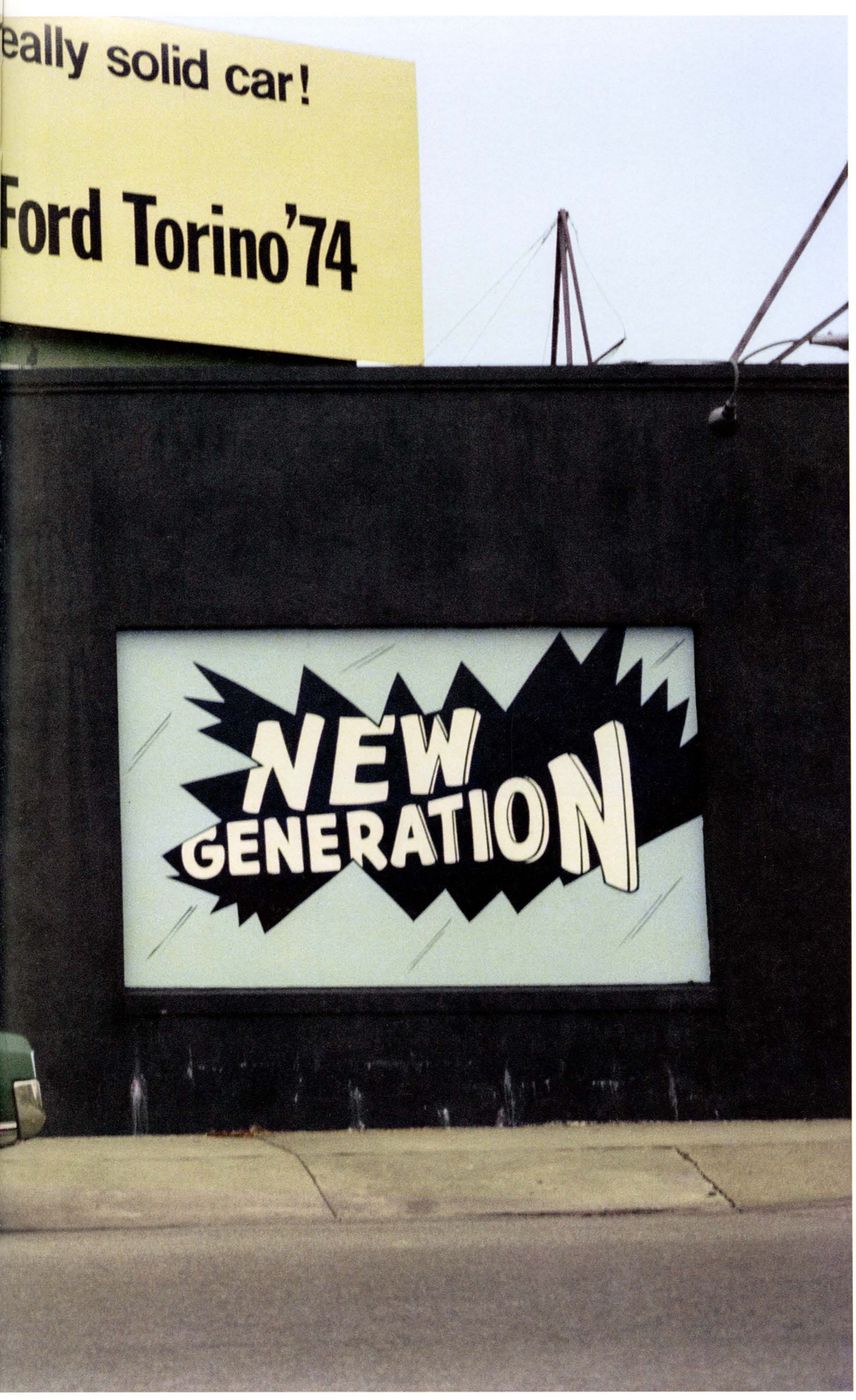
WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOST AND FOUND), 1972

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (THE SEVENTIES), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74



WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS
PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

WILLIAM EGGLESTON,
UNTITLED (LOS ALAMOS PORTFOLIO), 1965–74

LEE FRIEDLANDER

American Monument

1969 – 1975

For over fifty years Lee Friedlander has remained one of the America's preeminent photographer-motorists. Besides a few series made at home, each new project begins with a road trip of one kind or another. In his most expansive project, he photographed every conceivable type of monument in America: war memorials; public sculptures of past presidents; local statues of Faith, Hope, and Charity; kitsch and pompous erections on corporate plazas; and many humble tributes to forgotten citizens.

At first, it was not a conscious idea. Friedlander simply noticed that monuments had been creeping into his varied work. But once he had set about a more systematic coverage, nothing escaped his eye. The earliest pictures in the series date from the late 1960s, but the majority were taken between 1971 and 1975 on several road trips, visiting forty states. He made over a thousand prints. In 1976, 213 were published as *The American Monument*. Printed and bound like a mammoth nineteenth-century album or ledger, it was epic in every sense. And like all great photographic books it was a training manual, sequenced to school the viewer in the ways of a wholly new perception. It opens with a (not *the*) statue of Liberty in Ticonderoga, New York. Photographed frontally on a crisp winter's day it is a proud and upstanding civic statement. Liberty's billowing robes seem almost arrested by the camera's shutter. But before long we are forced to accept that America had swamped its statuary in the flotsam and jetsam of daily life. Indeed it is often the *invisibility* of monuments that is the true subject here. As permanent markers of significant people and events, they fight for attention amid transient gas stations, assorted signage, and shopping malls. Friedlander photographs some from his driver's seat, implicating the automobile in this state of affairs. Sometimes the monuments stand sentinel in neglected emptiness, but most often they recede into a generalized vista in which history is no more significant than the latest advertisement.

Elegiac and mournful, analytical and mischievous, deadpan but elusive, Friedlander laid out a vision that was both his signature style and a summary of the country's mood swings in its bicentennial year. Idealism was shading into pragmatism, but mutating into irony and cynicism, and back again. But if Friedlander is the quintessential photographer of the American scene since the 1960s, it is because such virtuoso pictures conjure order of chaos, or flip the order we know onto its head. Lofty art and endearing awkwardness collide in these observations, rooted in a deep understanding of the amateur's happy accident. Misaligned planes, confusing tones, and disorienting angles toy with our expectations and stretch pictorial convention until it almost snaps. The approaches are as various as the monuments and their settings, but each bares Friedlander's unmistakable imprint.

Since its publication *The American Monument* has itself become something of a monument: a hugely ambitious document and reminder of the way the world looked to Friedlander's disarming sensibility. So, in the end, the project leaves us with a profound question. Did photography assume the memorial function we once attributed to monuments, or was that desire for remembrance simply washed away in the modern flood of consumerism?

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
MOUNT RUSHMORE, SOUTH DAKOTA, 1969

LEE FRIEDLANDER, *LIBERTY WITH FRENCH, INDIAN, HIGHLANDER, AND GREEN MOUNTAIN SOLDIERS, TICONDEROGA, NEW YORK*, 1975

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
FOURTEENTH VERMONT INFANTRY, GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA, 1974

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
GENERAL GEORGE ROGERS CLARK,
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, 1975

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
FRANK LUKE, JR. CAPITOL GROUNDS,
PHOENIX, ARIZONA, 1974

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
APPEAL TO THE GREAT SPIRIT, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1975

LEE FRIEDLANDER, LOS ANGELES, 1972

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
FATHER DUFFY, TIMES SQUARE, NEW YORK,
NEW YORK, 1974

LEE FRIEDLANDER, *ADMIRAL RAPHAEL SEMMES OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES NAVY, MOBILE, ALABAMA*, 1969

LEE FRIEDLANDER, *MECHANIC'S MONUMENT, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA*, 1972

LEE FRIEDLANDER,
SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR,
YONKERS, NEW YORK, 1972

LEE FRIEDLANDER, *NEW ORLEANS*, 1969

JOEL MEYEROWITZ

Still Going

1967 – 1976

Joel Meyerowitz has made photographs on the road at several moments in his long and varied career. In 1964, he crisscrossed America, occasionally meeting up with his close friend Garry Winogrand who was doing the same. In 1968, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented *My European Trip: Photographs from the Car*, a selection of forty images Meyerowitz had taken during his few years in Britain, mainland Europe, Morocco, Greece, and Turkey. In the wall text for that show, curator John Szarkowski noted: "The old pedestrian's way of seeing the world, which allowed a subject to be walked around and studied and measured against the recollection of similar subjects on other days, seems largely the victim of technological progress. What we see of the world now reaches us as a succession of kaleidoscopic glimpses, unconnected and unexplained and unconsummated."

Years later, Meyerowitz himself recalled of that work: "I began to understand that the car window was the frame, and that in some way the car itself was the camera with me inside it, and that the world was scrolling by with a constantly changing image on the screen. All I had to do was raise the camera and blink to make a photograph."

Meyerowitz had returned from his European trip with fresh eyes, alert to the profound changes in America. Where the best road trip photography of the 1950s and '60s had been either angry or melancholic (and frequently both), much of the defining work of the 1970s was perplexed, fascinated, and even surreal in tone. Meyerowitz was attuned to the nation's wild incongruities, ideological contradictions, and dark rituals. Most often his subject was leisure and even this was a source of unsettling humor.

I saw how caught up the country was in consumerism and self-indulgence. How the Vietnam War was unfolding in front of us, and people seemed to go about their lives as if it wasn't their business. How the government and corporate America were creating an environment of distraction that seduced the majority of the citizens into becoming a submissive body politic. I had no idea how to do anything about this back then, but I felt I could try and make photographs about the way people were living their lives during this time and perhaps that could reflect some light on the matter. It seemed daunting to me at the time, but I needed to follow my sense of necessity.

From the start of his career, Meyerowitz had been a consummate photographer, supremely capable of absorbing influences to produce seductive images of great confidence and pictorial daring. Here, however, he was responding to a country all out of confidence and losing the power to seduce. There was no obvious way to photograph it. He searched, as Robert Frank had searched in a very different era, for a set of forms and motifs that would express this new malaise. Where Frank had looked to tattered flags and lonely jukeboxes, Meyerowitz saw rockets and cannons, remnants of military might and Cold War armament now deployed as ghoulishly comic roadside ornaments. Still Going is a ragged and uncertain vision, but all the more compelling for it. The photographs and the America they describe deserve each other, "unconnected and unexplained and unconsummated."

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *FLORIDA, 1970*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *PENNSYLVANIA, 1971*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *MICHIGAN, 1971*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *TEXAS, 1968*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *FLORIDA, 1969*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *SOUTH DAKOTA*, *1971*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *FLORIDA, 1967*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *FLORIDA*, *1967*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *SAN DIEGO, 1971*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ,
ANAWANDA LAKE, NEW YORK, 1970

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *NEW YORK, 1968*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ, *OHIO*, *1972*

JOEL MEYEROWITZ,
LOS ANGELES RIVER, CALIFORNIA, 1967

JACOB HOLDT

American Pictures

1971 – 1976

Beginning in 1971 the Danish Jacob Holdt hitchhiked around America for five years. He covered 113,750 miles on almost no funds, selling his plasma to blood banks twice a week for $5 a time. There he met many people who gave him somewhere to sleep. He visited nearly every state, staying with 434 families, mainly African-Americans in severe poverty. Occasionally, he was invited to stay with wealthy families. He renewed his tourist visa with visits every three months to the American consulates in Canada or Mexico City.

At first, Holdt reported his experiences in letters to his parents back in Denmark. In disbelief they sent him an economic Canon half-frame camera, which allowed seventy-two exposures on a thirty-six exposure roll of 35 mm slide film. In 1974, an elderly lady gave him $70 to drive her car down to Florida. Holdt used the money to make prints to show people. This led to a slow trickle of donations.

By 1976, he had amassed around fifteen thousand images. He returned to Denmark, putting together epic slideshows, over which he spoke his sober and unremitting testimony. For all the formal power of his photographs, Holdt was never interested in pictorial achievement. His passionate, immersive, and angry realism was never naïve or hotheaded. He had been acutely aware that photographs *show*, but cannot *explain*. A picture of a girl gazing into a dirty refrigerator describes a circumstance, and her appearing dwarfed by it may even point ironically to the empty promises of consumerism, but a coherent account of the evidence is beyond the camera. So Holdt began to write, moving between idioms—travelogue, reportage, confessional, and polemic. The following year he published the project as *Amerikanske billeder*. The simple layout used every inch of the pages, with multiple images and extensive texts describing corruption, drug abuse, racism, poor housing and health care, and worsening education. He saved some of his fiercest criticism for New York, the city from which so many photographers depart to look for "America." For him it is "a city which simply does not permit any human to be human," while its powerful white liberal tradition is no more than the "buffer troops of capitalism," able to absorb and neutralize criticism or scandal. The book became a bestseller. When Communist bloc countries attempted to use it as anti-American propaganda, Holdt withdrew the book wherever he could, only allowing its full release in 1989.

Holdt returned to the United States, publishing the work as *American Pictures*, in 1985, and embarking on a tour of over three hundred college campuses. In his preface he states his intention: "I will . . . mostly concentrate on pointing out the alarming human costs involved in *not* having a welfare state though I in no way claim that a welfare state alone will solve the race problem in America." Despite the title, Holdt remains adamant it is about racism and poverty in general, and that there is no such thing as "American racism."

Elsewhere in his text, Holdt doubts the work's power to effect change and fears it may even distance him from his subjects. But he hopes for many things: that America might learn from his descriptions of the way other countries treat their poor; that his project "will make young Americans rediscover their fantastic country—not as a series of postcards seen from sterile campers, but through being together with their beautiful fellow citizens," and that "it will get some of the young, unemployed people in Europe and America to start vagabonding in order to study the society, which had made them unemployed."

JACOB HOLDT,
PUSHERS IN CALIFORNIA

For a long time I hung out with pushers and criminals in the ghetto I lived in — perhaps being one myself? During our various activities they let me photograph almost without limits. I was nearly shot down by cops with drawn guns when they mistook my flashlight for a gunshot.

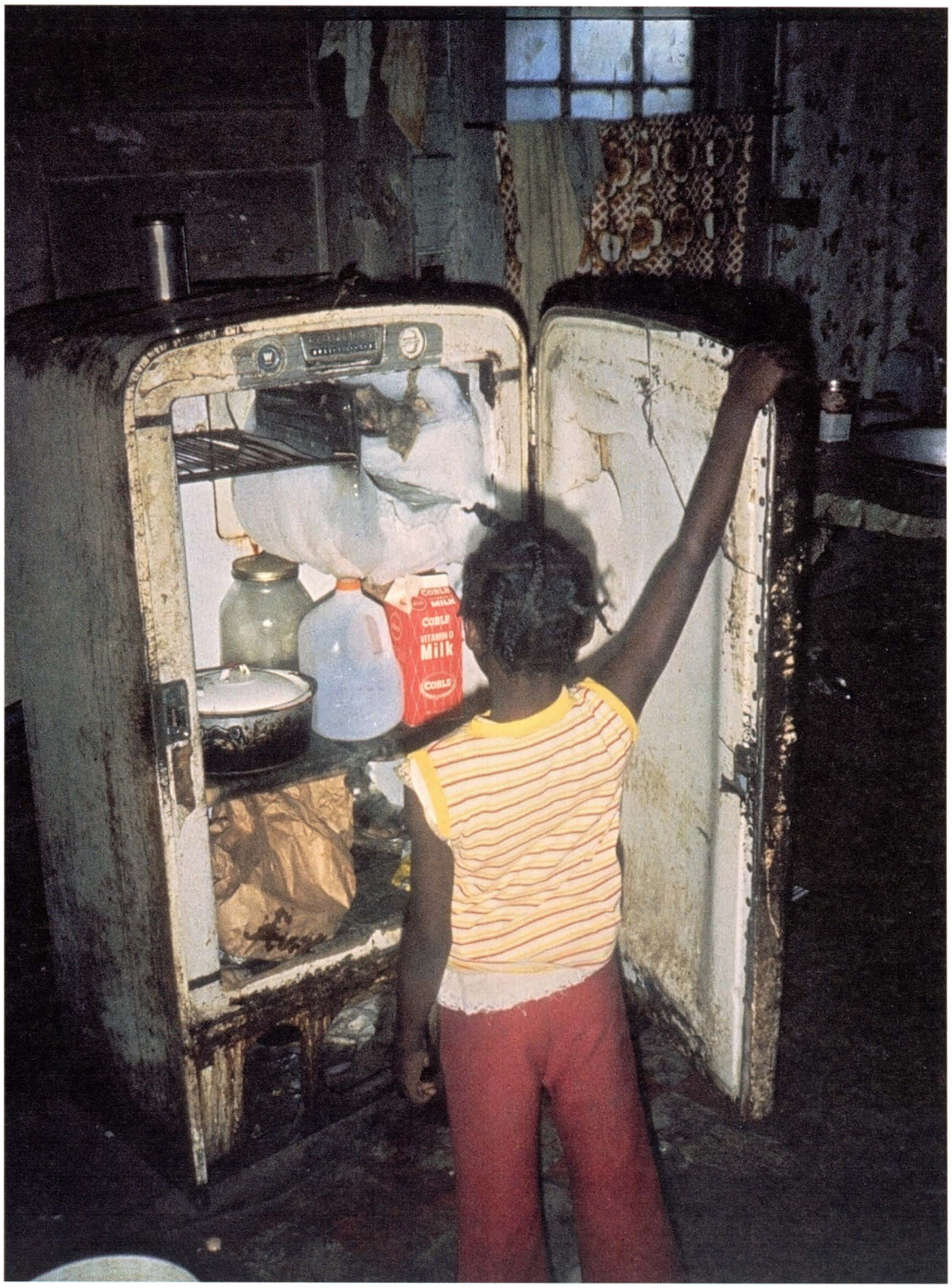
JACOB HOLDT, *SELL*

JACOB HOLDT, *PALM BEACH*

A leftist millionaire, Bill Gandalls, made me his driver and for a few days I wined and dined with the wealthiest people in the world.

JACOB HOLDT,
GIRL WITH CUBAN MAID, PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

JACOB HOLDT, THIS CLOCK WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING AND ROBERT KENNEDY WAS SEEN THROUGHOUT SHACKS IN GEORGIA IN THE 1970S.

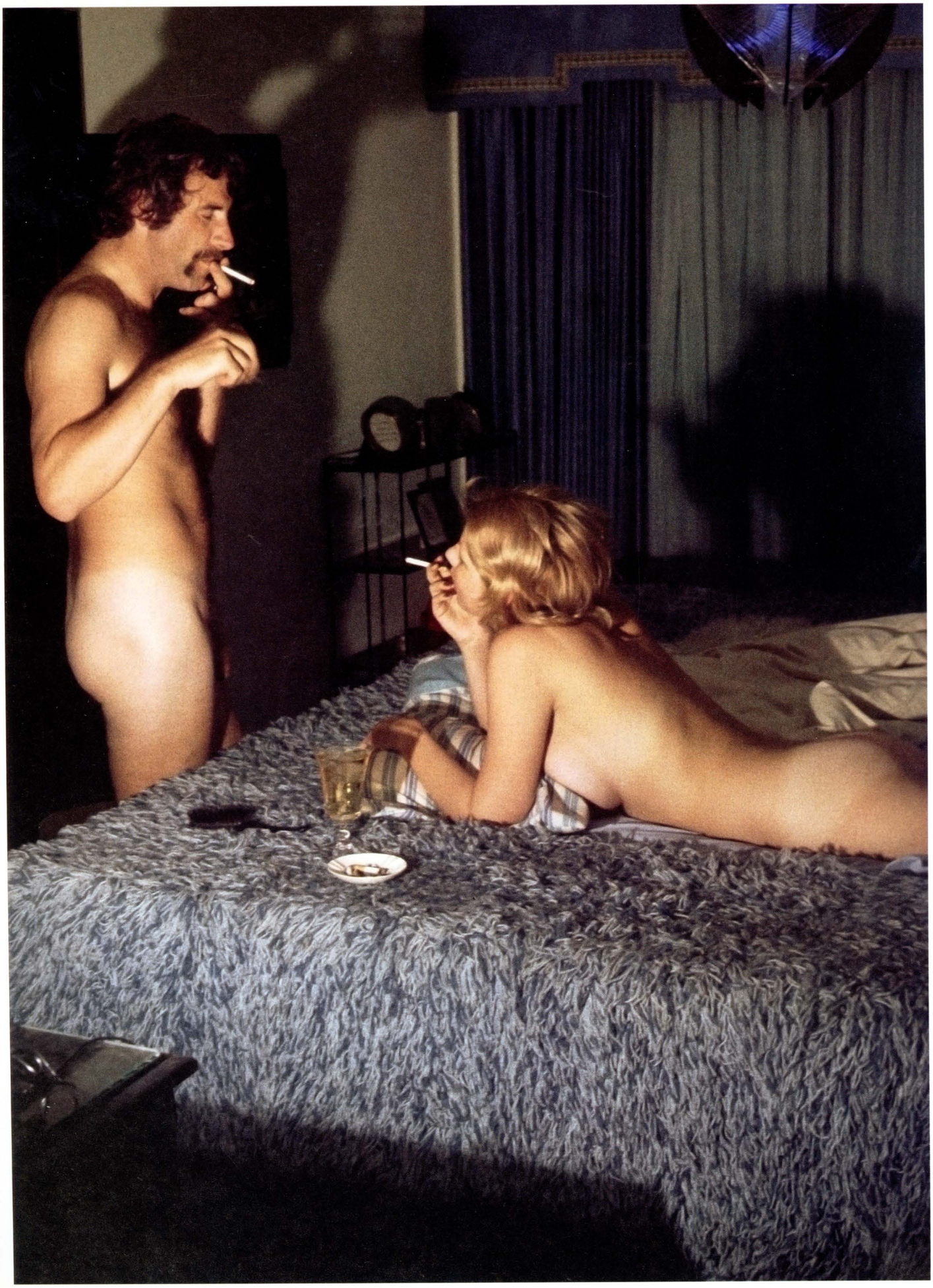


JACOB HOLDT,
(OPPOSITE) *SHARECROPPER IN GEORGIA*

(ABOVE) *HUNGER IN AMERICA 1975, BETHEL, NORTH CAROLINA*

This poor old woman of eighty-seven asked me to drive her to Phoenix, Arizona. She wanted to go there to die. I helped her board up the windows in her dilapidated shack outside Tuskegee. She knew she would never return, but did not want local blacks to move into it. She sat the whole way out there with a pistol in her hand, scared stiff of my long hair and beard. She was so weak that I had to carry her whenever she had to leave the car, still clinging to her gun.

JACOB HOLDT, *ALABAMA*



He picked me up in his huge motor home and was very influenced by my vagabond philosophy: "Security is being on the road with no money." That gave me a permanent key to his fancy "tree house" in Greenville, North Carolina. One night he and his date came jumping naked into my bedroom and I took this photo. He wanted "to become a vagabond" like me and later sold his business, drove his Jaguar out to Interstate 95 and hitchhiked away. He ended up in Africa, where he made his first black friend ever. His hometown is 50 percent black. He ended up spending seven years on the road, but is today a playboy millionaire again.

JACOB HOLDT,
(OPPOSITE) *PLAYBOY MILLIONAIRE WITH A LOVER*
(ABOVE) *COUPLE IN BROOKLYN*

When I lived with this couple in North Carolina I asked if I could take a picture of them in bed. They were a bit shy, but after hitchhiking all over the country and writing them a letter about the beauty of such a picture, they said yes. So I hitchhiked back from California to the tobacco fields of North Carolina and stayed with them again.

Among the prostitutes who made the strongest impression on me was Geegurtha who was in the midst of a struggle to escape slavery. When I first met her she had been in prison and was almost totally destroyed by narcotics and violence. Her daughter was born an addict, but was saved through blood transfusions. Through an enormous effort Geegurtha rehabilitated herself. She became manager of the clinic in Greensboro which once helped her, and majored in psychology in college. Today she e-mails me often from her home in Atlanta.

STEPHEN SHORE

Uncommon Places

1973 – 1981

"I would be in a flat, nowhere place of the earth, and every now and then, I would walk outside or be driving down a road, and the light would hit something and for a few minutes, the place would be transformed." — Stephen Shore

In the second half of the 1960s, the young New Yorker Stephen Shore was photographing Andy Warhol and life in the Factory. Warhol's wry fascination with American culture was infectious, but Shore also saw the hard-working artist moving from one pictorial problem to the next. In 1969, Shore visited friends in Amarillo, Texas, and immediately felt attracted to the place: the piercing light, the gentler rhythms of daily life, the wide-open space, and the car culture:

It was exotic, but familiar too. I didn't love it like a tourist; I got into it. I would go there for a month at a time. I thought of myself as an explorer. Growing up in Manhattan, you don't have a car. Cars are a headache there, so I never learned to drive. My friends in Amarillo were driving at sixteen. When I learned, it was a liberating experience. I could get into a car and have a credit card in my pocket and I could just go—go for days. It was the sense of freedom and independence that I loved. I found that after a few days of driving behind the wheel and watching with attention as this world kept passing by, I entered a kind of meditative state. My mind became quiet, and I became very focused.

At first Shore photographed voraciously on 35 mm film, making color pictures of most things around him. Food, friends, bedrooms, TV sets, streets, and shop fronts. These became American Surfaces, exhibited at New York's Light Gallery as a long grid of unframed drugstore prints. This was a time when few understood color photography, or such presentation, or even the value of such quotidian subject matter.

In pursuit of more detail, he switched to a 4-by-5 and then an 8-by-10 camera. Because he had to use a tripod with these larger cameras, the images now became slower and more studied. Almost immediately Shore mastered what was possible. Over the next seven years there were many road trips during which he shifted from complex compositions to apparently simple observations and back again. Some of the photographs feel like raw and direct vision. Others are marvels of formal order, consummate pictorial translations of three dimensions into two. Throughout, Shore describes the hues and textures of 1970s America. Fabrics, plastics, cars, fields, plants, homes, modish interiors, and the creeping haphazardry of the country's exterior. In the parking lots and intersections Shore found symptoms of the country's lurching development.

Shore's photographs are analytical but not overtly critical, curious yet distanced, at once literal and consciously symbolic. In this sense, they carry forward a way of understanding and picturing America first distilled by Walker Evans. "I was fascinated with architecture as a physical expression of cultural forces. That's what I'm always looking for. A picture can contain conflict, but that's not all the picture is about."

As soon as he felt he was repeating himself, Shore brought this way of working to a close. Overall, there are some seven hundred photographs that Shore feels belong to the project. Uncommon Places was first published in 1982 with forty-nine images. The emphasis was on intersections and roadsides, but in reality the approach had a far greater sweep. There are landscapes, townscapes, studies of buildings, portraits, and still lifes—all motivated by the sheer challenge of picture making and the complex pleasure to be taken in things and appearances.

STEPHEN SHORE,
U.S. 97, SOUTH OF KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON, JULY 21, 1973

STEPHEN SHORE,
ROOM 125, WESTBANK MOTEL,
IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO, JULY 18, 1973

STEPHEN SHORE,
TRAIL'S END RESTAURANT,
KANAB, UTAH, AUGUST 10, 1973

STEPHEN SHORE,
WEST THIRD STREET, PARKERSBURG,
WEST VIRGINIA, MAY 16, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
CHURCH STREET AND SECOND STREET,
EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA, JUNE 20, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
MRS. MAY'S HOME, SUMNER, MISSISSIPPI, MAY 4, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
U.S. 10, POST FALLS, IDAHO, AUGUST 25, 1974

NO
PARKING
ANY
TIME

STEPHEN SHORE,
WASHINGTON STREET, WATERTOWN,
NEW YORK, AUGUST 1, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
ST. MARY'S ROAD, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, AUGUST 16, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
FROOM CRESCENT, REGINA,
SASKATCHEWAN, AUGUST 17, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
SECOND STREET EAST AND SOUTH MAIN STREET,
KALISPELL, MONTANA, AUGUST 22, 1974

STEPHEN SHORE,
BEVERLY BOULEVARD AND LA BREA AVENUE,
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, JUNE 21, 1975

STEPHEN SHORE,
MAIN STREET, FORT WORTH, TEXAS, JUNE 17, 1976

STEPHEN SHORE,
U.S. 93, WIKIEUP, ARIZONA, DECEMBER 14, 1976

STEPHEN SHORE,
PENNINGTON STREET, TUCSON,
ARIZONA, DECEMBER 17, 1976

STEPHEN SHORE,
WASHINGTON STREET, STRUTHERS, OHIO, OCTOBER 27, 1977

STEPHEN SHORE,
GINGER SHORE, CAUSEWAY INN,
TAMPA, FLORIDA, NOVEMBER 17, 1977

BERNARD PLOSSU

So Long

1970 – 1985

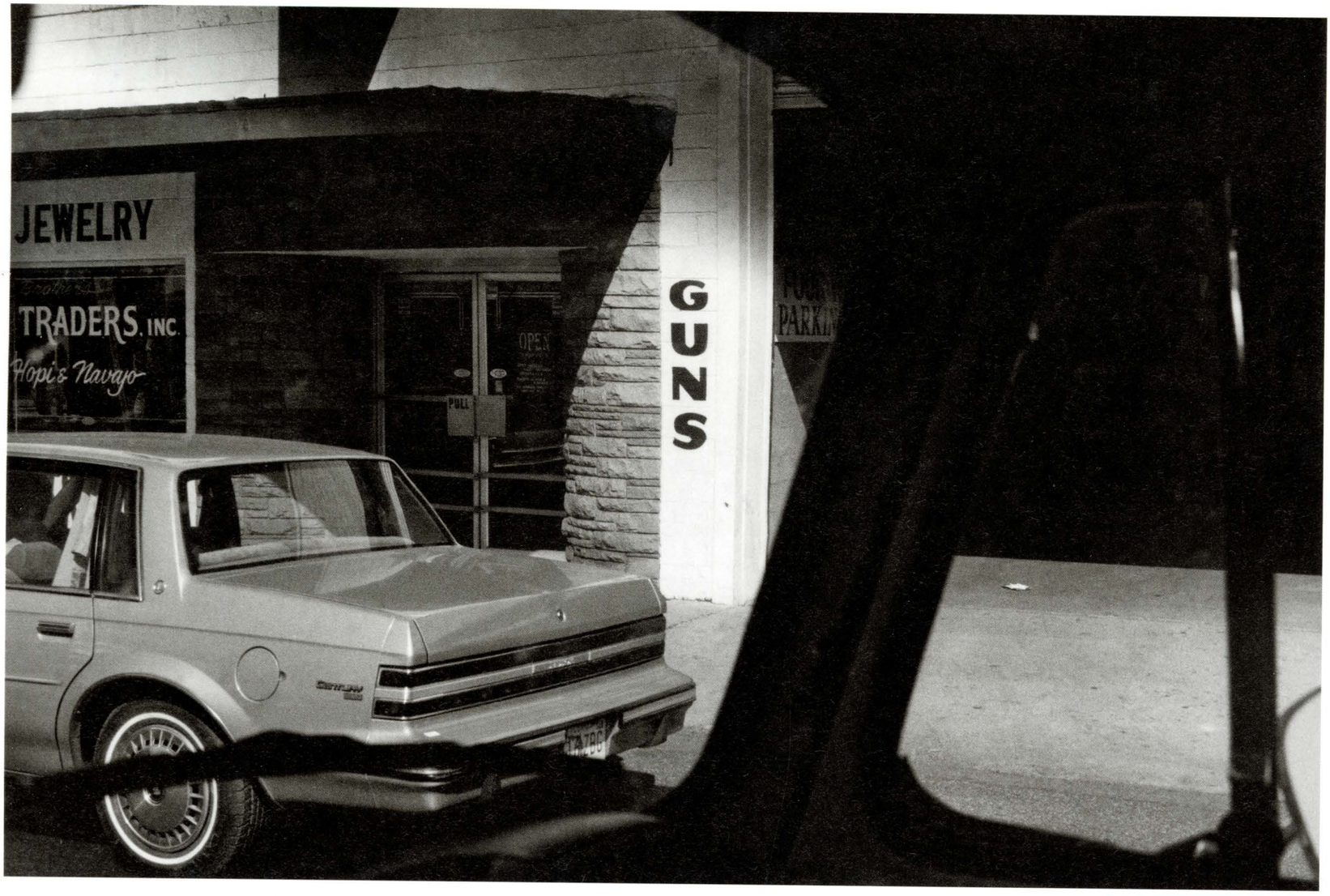
Born in South Vietnam but based in Paris, Bernard Plossu has traveled all over the world. An early trip to the Sahara desert ignited his passion for photography. Lucid encounters in open space and intense light inform much of his American work, with its characteristic mixture of delirium and peace. In 1965, aged twenty, he visited Mexico and met numerous people, one of whom took him to California (Carmel and Big Sur). From then on, for two decades, he never stopped driving the country's roads even after he became an American resident and moved to New Mexico from 1978 to 1985. His great loves were beatnik America, nature, the California Sierras, and the poetry of Garry Snyder. He met all kinds of people from all walks of life, and the whole experience was accompanied by music on the radio. Sometimes he was in a Volkswagen van, or in an old convertible gold Oldsmobile Cutlass, bought from a Texan lady for seven hundred dollars (and shining in the final image here). It was a freewheeling life, all of it new and constantly exciting. He stayed with friends and in hotels when he traveled: "I'm in love with hotels—in art, in photography, in literature, and in films. They're places where you can leave everything behind. Changing from one room to another is like changing film in a camera. They're like islands, you take a little with you, and you change your sense of rhythm. For me, they are the symbol for travel."

Plossu was taking commercial assignments, shooting in color. But for himself, he used black-and-white film and a Nikkormat with a 50 mm lens: "No gimmicks, no effects, no distortion. It is the purest, simplest and truest vision." He admired the camera *à l'epaule*, the shoulder camera of Raoul Coutard, the cinematographer for Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, and the camerawork of John Cassavettes' films, which had made a great impression when he was young, along with movies by Shirley Clark and Kenneth Anger.

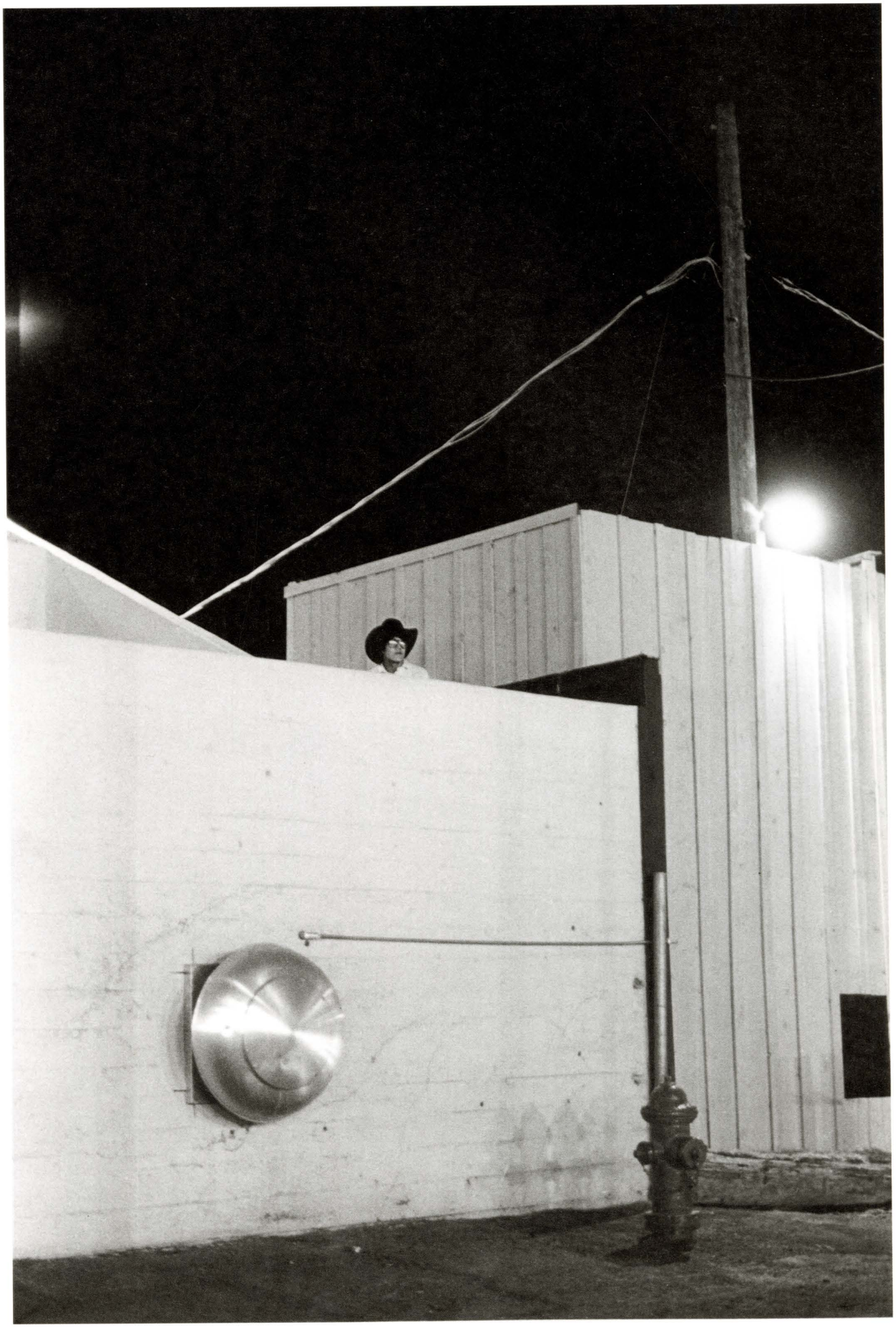
He explored Los Angeles, but traveled mostly in the Southwest, via Deming, New Mexico, west to Flagstaff and north, back and forth dozens of times. He took the dirt roads from Cochise to Tombstone, searching for ghost towns in Arizona. He walked to abandoned forts, looking for the presence of the Chiricahua Apache Indians (Cochise, their chief, was Plossu's childhood movie hero from the Westerns). He also camped in Frenchie's Canyon, New Mexico, and in Utah, getting lost on long wilderness walks.

Most of these pictures remained unseen until an opportunity arose for an exhibition and book in 2007. How to title such a project? "After many ideas, I just came up with 'so long,' 'au revoir,' like Fats Domino's song. It's haunting."

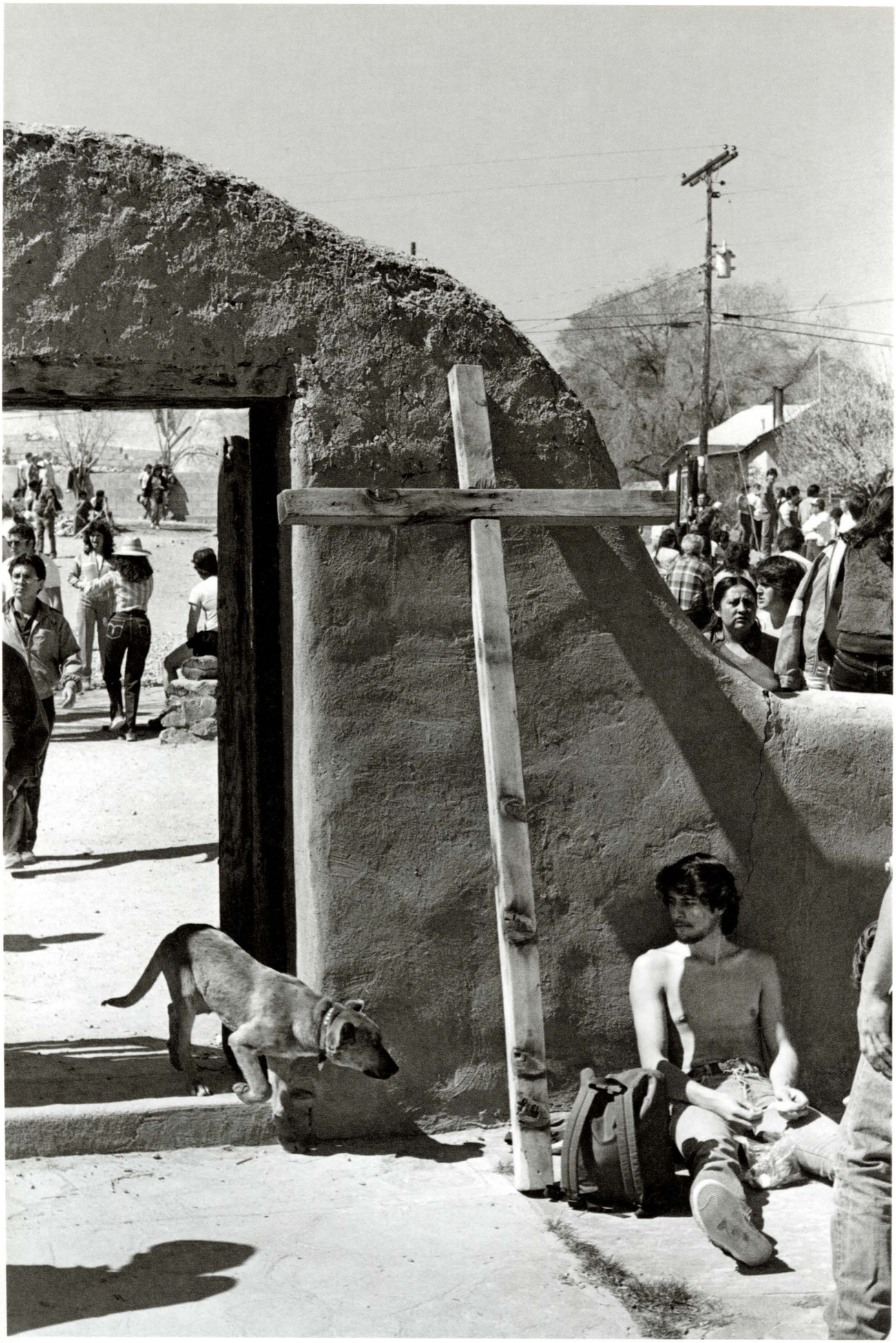
BERNARD PLOSSU, *COCHISE, ARIZONA*, 1979



BERNARD PLOSSU,
(ABOVE) *ARIZONA*, 1983
(OPPOSITE) *PHOENIX*, 1979



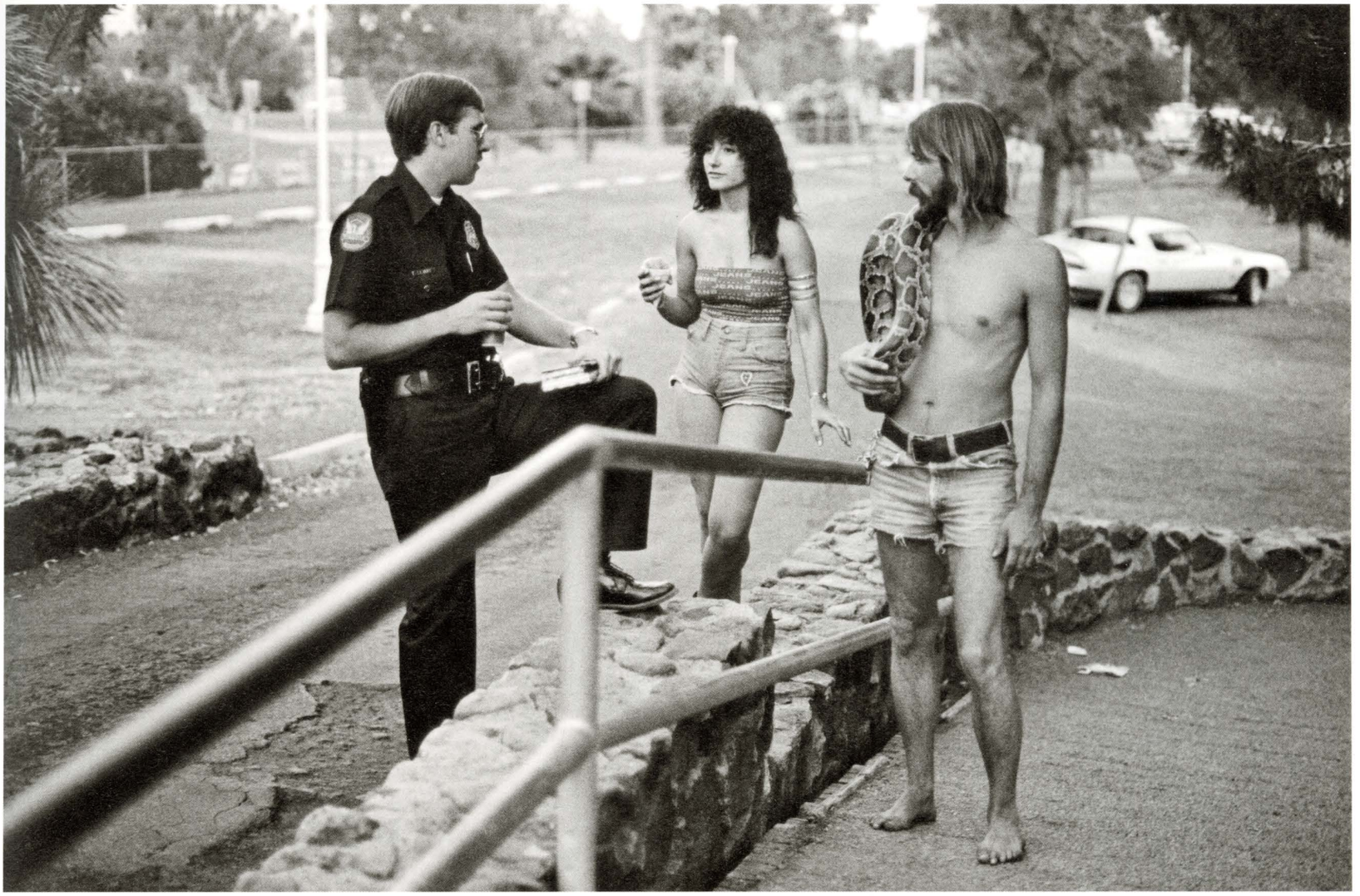
BERNARD PLOSSU, *NEW MEXICO*, 1980



BERNARD PLOSSU,
(OPPOSITE) *NEW MEXICO*, 1985
(RIGHT) *SAN FRANCISCO*, 1982

BERNARD PLOSSU,
NEW MEXICO, NEAR ESPAÑOLA, 1979

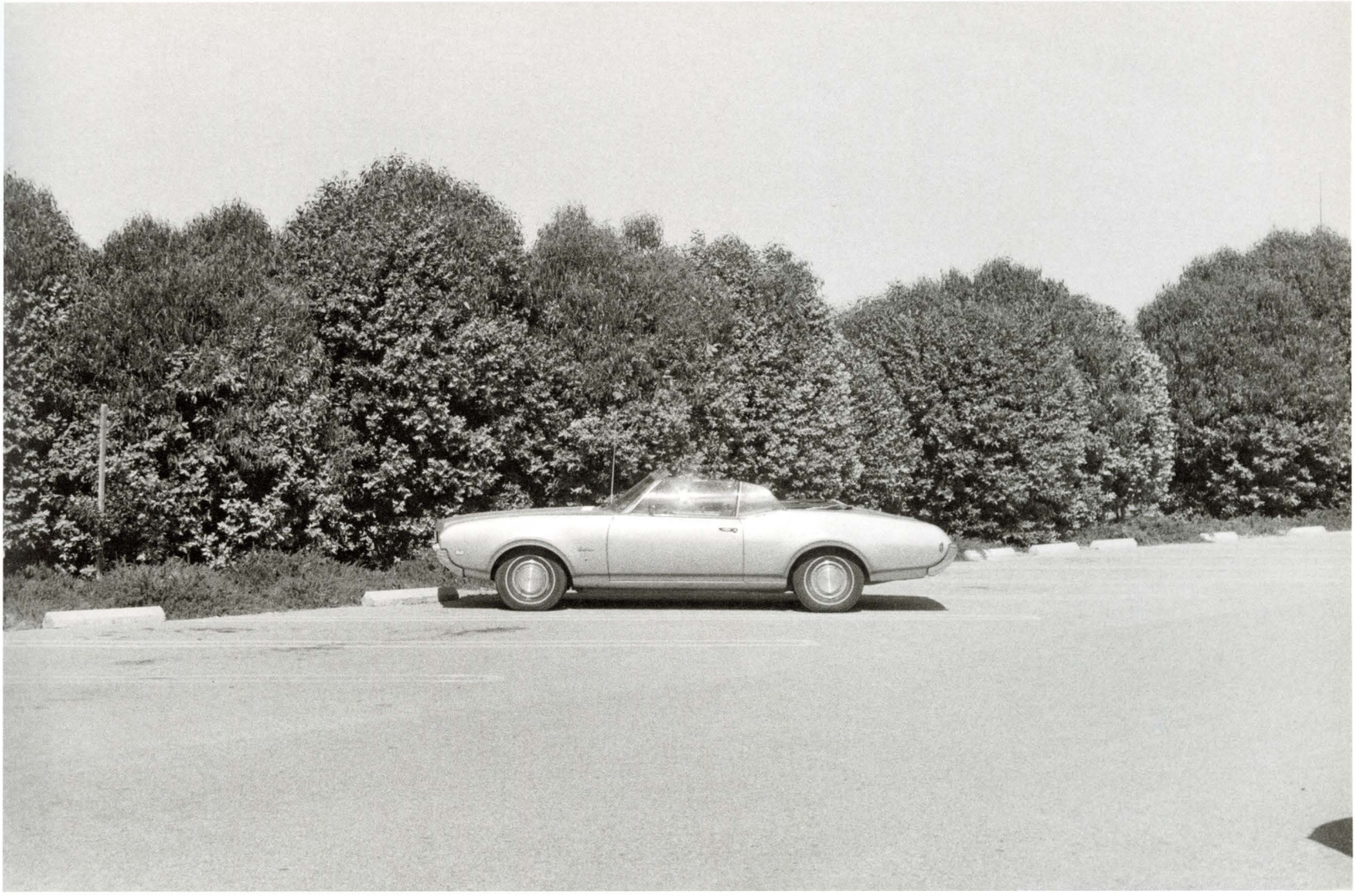
CAKE
PLAYBOY



BERNARD PLOSSU,
(OPPOSITE) *LOS ANGELES*, 1979
(ABOVE) *PHOENIX*, 1980

BERNARD PLOSSU, *CALIFORNIA*, 1981

BERNARD PLOSSU, *LOS ANGELES*, 1980



BERNARD PLOSSU, *CALIFORNIA*, 1974

VICTOR BURGIN

1977

The English artist Victor Burgin described his twelve-panel work *US77* as his *road movie*: "It can be seen as a sort of 'static film' where the individual scenes have collapsed inwards upon themselves so that the narrative connections have become lost." In 1977, he crossed the country by car: Manhattan, Cape Kennedy, Utah, Las Vegas, San Francisco.

I was just photographing whatever caught my attention. I assumed I would use some of the shots eventually in an image-text work, but I had nothing particular in mind while shooting. The texts were composed through a, more or less, free association to the images. I would pin the images on the wall, and pin file cards with the texts beneath—then replace images, rewrite texts, until a more or less coherent ensemble emerged.

Burgin had been shooting in various cities since the early 1970s. *US77* borrows visual strategies from Lee Friedlander and Garry Winogrand although Burgin sensed they represented the endgame of a genre that had perhaps become defined too tightly by its own protocols and criteria:

I was very much reminded of the history of modernist painting—you had to run that much faster every day just to stay where you were, the hairs left to split were getting thinner. But I never saw myself as working on becoming a street photographer. I was citing street photography in the context of a broader practice, one where I was making up the rules as I went. The way I saw it, street photography was one layer of historical associations in my work amongst others—to be appreciated by those who knew how to see it—but it was never the point of the work.

By 1977 street photography was being studied by a new generation raised on the "classics," who would then go on to adopt and adapt its tricks and tics. Having come to prominence within conceptual art, Burgin turned toward strategies of appropriation, quotation, and allegory to mix the already converging tropes of high art and mass media. *US77* is a critical meeting of street photography, advertising, poetry, philosophy, cultural critique, and movie publicity. It addresses the interpenetration of real and imaginary space, and the intersections of sexuality and politics—themes explored much more readily in American literature and cinema of the period.

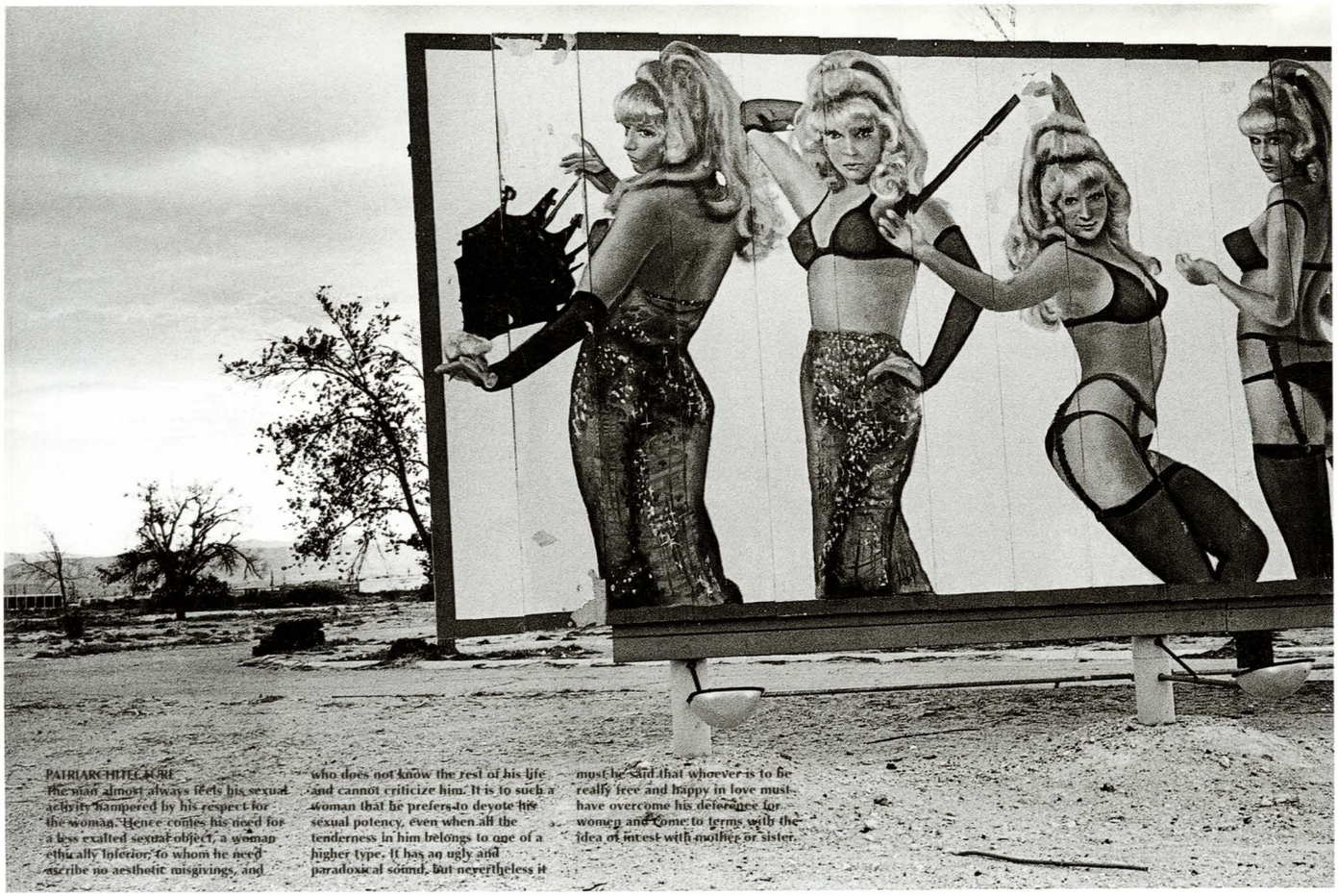
The presence of text over image is familiar in daily life—TV news, billboards, magazines—but it remains an affront to the pictorial tradition. Moreover, these are not the smooth running word-picture combinations of mass culture. Burgin's free associations suggest and provoke, opening up interpretive gaps between what we see and what we read.

FRAMED
A dark-haired woman in her late-fifties hands over a photograph showing the haircut she wants duplicating 'exactly'.
The picture shows a very young woman with blond hair cut extremely short.
The hairdresser props it by the mirror in which he can see the face of his client watching her own reflection.
When he has finished he removes the cotton cape from the woman's shoulders. 'That's it', he says.
But the woman continues sitting, continues staring at her reflection in the mirror.

VICTOR BURGIN, *FRAMED*, 1977

NUCLEAR POWER
The father gives his kind command,
the mother joins, approves;
the children all attentive stand,
then each obedient moves.

VICTOR BURGIN,
NUCLEAR POWER, 1977



VICTOR BURGIN,
(ABOVE) *PATRIARCHITECTURE*, 1977

(OPPOSITE, TOP) *OMNIMPOTENCE*, 1977
(OPPOSITE, BOTTOM) *FALSE PERSPECTIVE*, 1977

OMNIMPOTENCE
Economically speaking, the father's authority in the home is an anachronism which recalls pre-industrial times when he directed family-based production. In most cases today the father is himself merely a commodity in the labour-market. His 'authority' now serves to reproduce in his children his own subservience to corporate and state power, providing them with the image of an ultimately benevolent controlling wisdom through which they will later tend to view all others who wield power over them. The objective authority of the father has collapsed into that gap which the factory opened between work and family-life. Simultaneously master-of-the-house and a servant in his place of employment, the identity of the patriarch as wage-slave is in perpetual transit between work and home.

FALSE PERSPECTIVE
Mankind never lives entirely in the present.
The past, the tradition of the race, and of the people,
lives on in the ideologies of the super-ego,
and yields only slowly to the influence of the present;
and so long as it operates through the super-ego
it plays a powerful part in human life,
independent of economic conditions.

JOEL STERNFELD

American Prospects

1978 – 1983

Joel Sternfeld grew up in Rockaway, New York, a block from the beach. He had from childhood an agrarian, seasonal sensitivity, alert to the smallest changes in the natural environment—the feeling of the ground underfoot, the wind in the trees, birds in the air, clouds moving across the sky. In early 1978, at aged thirty-three, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship that allowed him to travel with the seasons, stopping off at the places where they manifest most profoundly. It was an audacious plan to photograph throughout the country. The initial intention was to continue the fluid 35 mm color photography he had been pursuing in New York, but he switched to an 8-by-10 view camera, exposing rarely more than two negatives a day.

Beginning in southwest Virginia, he made several extended trips in his white Volkswagen camper. He would wait for cool days to FedEx his film home for processing. Going for up to six months without seeing the results kept him sharp and hungry. He would edit mentally, keeping a list of what he thought he had and might need.

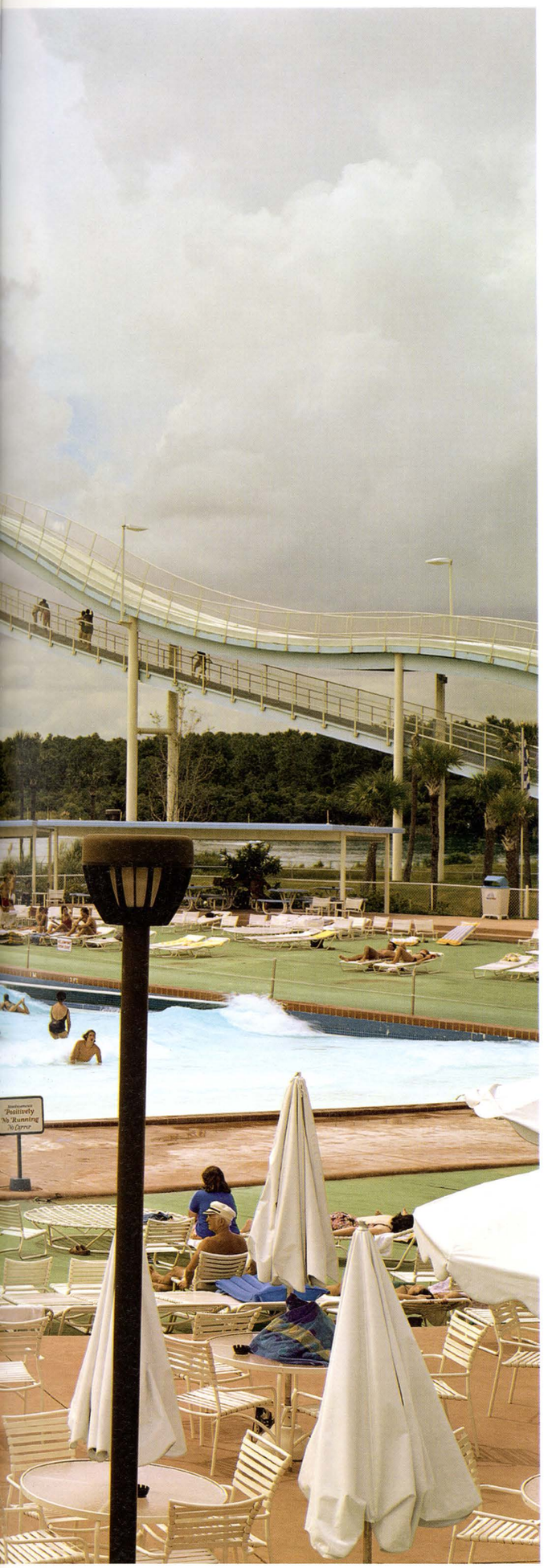
Informed by a deep interest in the history of nature painting, Sternfeld worked hard to picture the cycle of seasons alongside outward signs of social and economic change: patterns of settlement, the accretions of industry, traces of technology, new land management, leisure, and mass culture. This fine balance served a broader aim to consider the fate of America as the great and noble experiment in democracy.

Since Robert Frank had laid bare the nation's shortcomings in the 1950s, the "dark underbelly" had become a well-worn theme of mainstream literature, art, and cinema. Sternfeld took a longer historical perspective, looking at the way much older values morph under the strain of progress yet seem to persist. He made deceptively classical compositions often containing wild counterpoints: fire fighters extinguish a blaze while one of them shops nonchalantly for pumpkins; an escaped elephant falls exhausted in the wrong kind of nature; comfortable suburbia teeters on the edge of a landslide; swimmers out in nature prefer the artifice of a man-made pool. The metaphors are unnerving but not overtly critical. Sternfeld's outlook is essentially optimistic, assessing the past, present, and future with equal benevolence. Nevertheless, rural and small-town life, forever idealized by American culture, is often a world of ineffable disquiet and, as such, it is perfectly suited to the enigmas of the still and mute large-format image.

After several years of shooting and delays with publishers, Sternfeld issued his opus in 1987 under the canny title *American Prospects*. Prospects as in "views." Prospects as in "likely future." That year David Lynch released his film *Blue Velvet*. In different ways, both artists heralded a new native surrealism—affectionate, gently insistent, seductive, and disarming.

JOEL STERNFELD,
AFTER A FLASH FLOOD, RANCHO MIRAGE, CALIFORNIA, JULY 1979

Wet'n Wild



JOEL STERNFELD,
WET'N WILD AQUATIC THEME PARK,
ORLANDO, FLORIDA, SEPTEMBER 1980

JOEL STERNFELD,
PAGE, ARIZONA, AUGUST 1983

JOEL STERNFELD,
THE SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA LANDS AT KELLY
LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE,
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, MARCH 1979

JOEL STERNFELD,
GRESHAM, OREGON, JUNE 1979

JOEL STERNFELD,
PARK CITY, UTAH, AUGUST 1979

JOEL STERNFELD,
ARCHITECTURE MUSEUM, PROVINCETOWN,
MASSACHUSETTS, JULY 1980

JOEL STERNFELD,
DOMESTIC WORKERS WAITING FOR THE BUS,
ATLANTA, GEORGIA, APRIL 1983

JOEL STERNFELD,
SOLAR POOL PETALS, TUCSON, ARIZONA, APRIL 1979

JOEL STERNFELD,
GLEN CANYON DAM, PAGE, ARIZONA, AUGUST 1983

JOEL STERNFELD,
BEAR LAKE, UTAH, JULY 1979

JOEL STERNFELD,
MCLEAN, VIRGINIA, DECEMBER 1978

JOEL STERNFELD,
EXHAUSTED RENEGADE ELEPHANT,
WOODLAND, WASHINGTON, JUNE 1979

JOEL STERNFELD,
APPROXIMATELY 17 OF 41 SPERM WHALES
THAT BEACHED AND SUBSEQUENTLY DIED,
FLORENCE, OREGON, JUNE 1979

SHINYA FUJIWARA

American Roulette

1988

Shinya Fujiwara has photographed in many countries around the world. Born in 1944, he began to travel while enrolled as a student of oil painting at Tokyo University, but he soon turned to photography. He visited the Middle East, Near East, and India, lived in Tibet for three years, and spent twelve years travelling through Asia. Back in Japan, he published influential books of this work. In 1988, he had an opportunity to travel across the United States in a motor home for seven months.

Motor homes are the modern version of wagons, so I wanted to look at America in that way. In the summer, I dropped by the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. At the entrance was a huge American flag and on a lawn was an exhibition of past rockets. Families were taking pictures in front of them, under the hot sun and bright light. They were re-experiencing the American Dream. Inside, the building was cool and the atmosphere was solemn. There I saw full-size waxworks of the group of astronauts who had died on the Challenger space shuttle two years before. A man from India or Pakistan approached me and described where he had been when the explosion happened. Soon a group gathered around. Because America is a diverse nation, nobody knew at first who was from where. The Challenger astronauts were also diverse, like a compressed form of the nation. It was a very social situation, coming together to talk and share. I think the Japanese are also like this in some ways. I noticed in America there were many sushi bars. Why are they so popular? The sushi chef performs with his knives and the customers gather around.

On his American trip, Fujiwara's curiosity was boundless. Everything was of interest and everything seemed to speak of the USA. Idyllic suburbs and gritty backstreets. Open prairies and over-populated cities. Tourist attractions and trashy take-away joints. Beaches and backyards. Flickering images on high-color TV screens, blurry impressions of city lights. His pictures contain echoes of many approaches to photography, both Japanese and American. Out of this patchwork of styles and motifs, Fujiwara assembled his book *American Roulette*. The images were printed on several different paper stocks and accompanied by writings from his diaries.

In 1990, a number of his most striking images of the American desert became known internationally when they appeared on the artwork for the only album released by Rain Tree Crow, the British band who had previously recorded under the name Japan. Although widely celebrated in his own country, beyond a few pockets of devoted followers Fujiwara's work still remains largely unseen in the West.

SHINYA FUJIWARA, UNTITLED
(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

SHINYA FUJIWARA, UNTITLED
(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

SHINYA FUJIWARA, UNTITLED
(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

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(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

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(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

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(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

SHINYA FUJIWARA, UNTITLED
(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

SHINYA FUJIWARA, UNTITLED
(FROM THE SERIES AMERICAN ROULETTE), 1988

ALEC SOTH

Sleeping by the Mississippi

1999 – 2002

"I think I am better when I am away from home, but not too far. Away from the distractions, but close enough to read the minutiae and details of an environment I understand." — Alec Soth

When on the road, photographers often pass straight through the Midwest, heading for California or the Deep South. Alec Soth, however, is from Minnesota and his hometown is right on the Mississippi River. He has a feeling for the people, places, look, light, and rhythms of the Midwest. The vistas are less grand and the encounters less exotic, but it's a generous part of America—tolerant of idiosyncrasy with space to live as you please. It does not impose itself upon photographers, but offers them the space to find their feet and feel their way in. Following the river with his 8-by-10 view camera, Soth researched as he went, using the Internet to find out about the next place along.

He had studied photography at college and was working through his influences quite self-consciously, picking his way through the medium's accumulated conventions and traditions. But this did not prevent a genuine and honest observation of the world around him. While the images are reminiscent of Walker Evans, Nicholas Nixon, Sally Mann, Stephen Shore, Joel Sternfeld, and even the narrative tableaux of Jeff Wall, the sensibility is Soth's own.

The notion of "sleeping" distances the project from the more straightforward documentary reading. The mood is dreamlike, a poetic yet lucid encounter with a world suspended between past and future. Beds and mattresses recur. People are photographed in various states of reverie. Interiors contain paintings or photographs that seem to wish for somewhere or someone else. The grand Mississippi, once an important trade route, now appears lost and melancholic. Even the gas station—that staple of road trip photography—is haunted by an adjacent cemetery. And yet Soth's eye is hungry and optimistic. Each image takes great pleasure in the sheer existence of things, pushing beyond factual description into something more personally projective. The subjects are somber and serious yet the translation into pictures is joyous, humorous, and curious.

The confidence and maturity of *Sleeping by the Mississippi* is all the more remarkable given that this was Alec Soth's first major photographic project and his first publication. The book was a huge popular success, which seemed to open new doors, but the restless Soth knew it should not be repeated. He left this way of working to pursue ever more varied ways of being with a camera in the world.

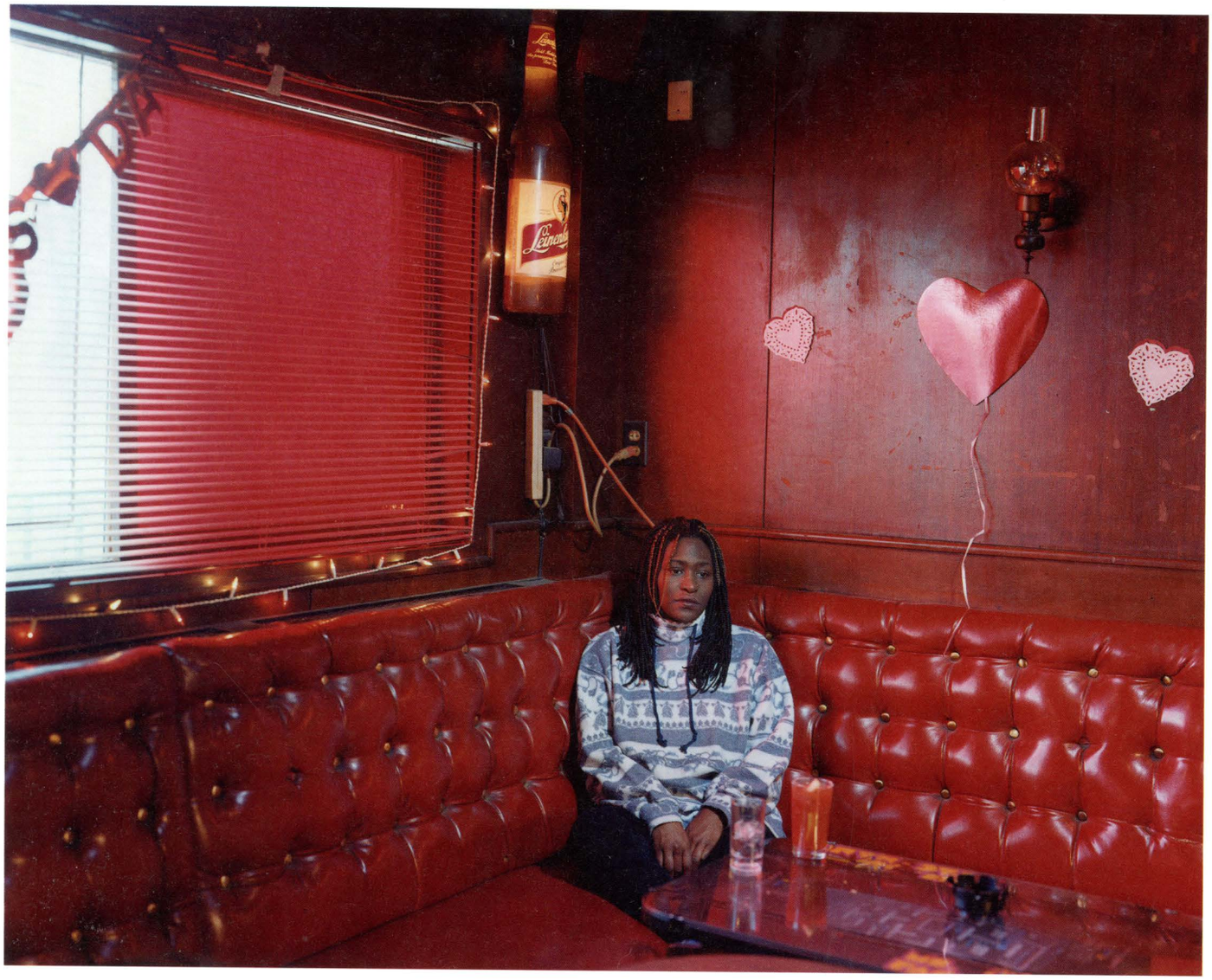
ALEC SOTH,
PATRICK, PALM SUNDAY, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, 2002

ALEC SOTH,
JOHNNY CASH'S BOYHOOD HOME,
DYESS, ARKANSAS, 2002

ALEC SOTH,
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, 2002

ALEC SOTH,
CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI, 2002

ALEC SOTH,
ADELYN, ASH WEDNESDAY,
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, 2000

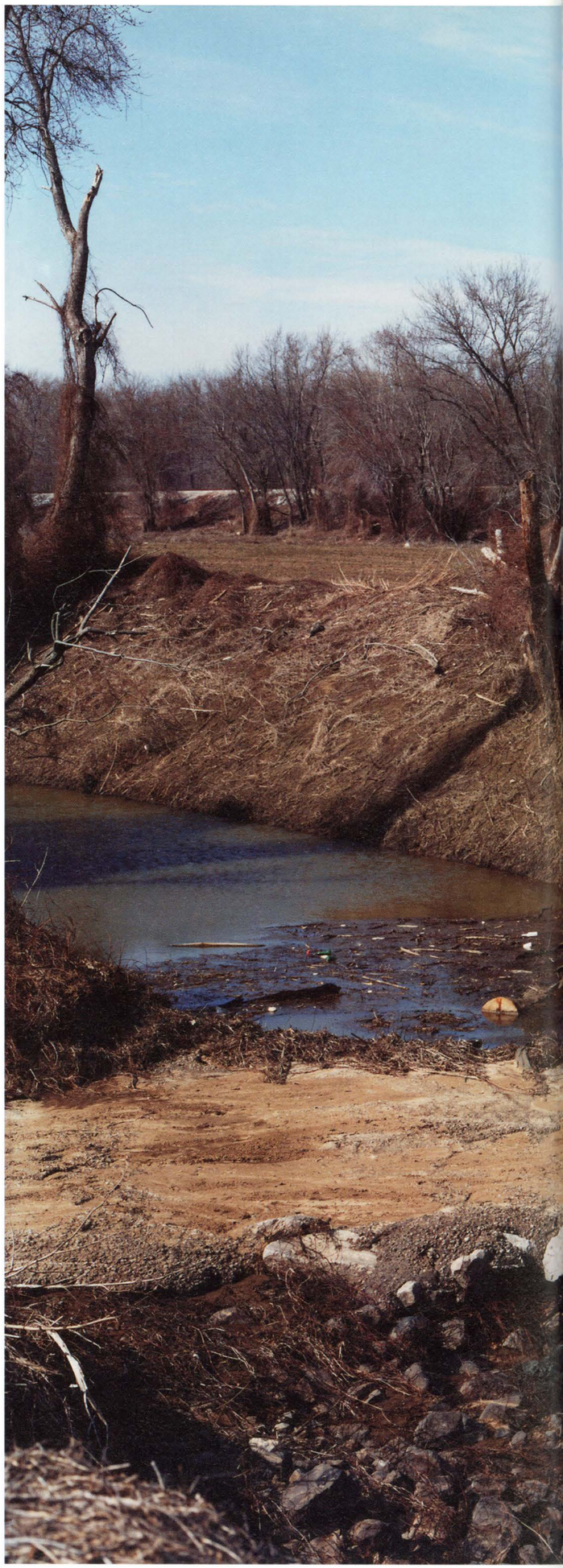


ALEC SOTH,
(ABOVE) *KYM, POLISH PALACE, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA*, 2000

(OPPOSITE) *SUGAR'S, DAVENPORT, IOWA*, 2002

AIDS & Priests
Copping a Feel
Elderly Sex

ALEC SOTH, *HELENA, ARKANSAS*, 2002



ALEC SOTH,
FISHERMEN, WICKLIFFE, KENTUCKY, 2002

ALEC SOTH,
(OPPOSITE) *CHARLES, VASA, MINNESOTA*, 2002

(ABOVE) *PETER'S HOUSEBOAT, WINONA, MINNESOTA*, 2002

ALEC SOTH,
CEMETERY, FOUNTAIN CITY, WISCONSIN, 2002

TODD HIDO

A Road Divided

2006 – 2010

What is the essence of road trip photography? Is it a shot of a diner? A gas station? A hitchhiker? An intersection? Or is it a glimpse of the endless stretches of time and space experienced *between* such things? Might the essence be simply a road passing through a landscape to the horizon beneath a sky? And what of the car itself? Should it be visible, or is it merely part of the apparatus that makes the image possible? *A Road Divided* takes up these questions, answering that any reduction will lead to other kinds of expansion and possibility.

At first, Todd Hido's views seem unlikely. Low and heavy weather, wet air and sodden ground. Human presence is pared back to the occasional nondescript building, tree, telegraph pole, or glimpse of headlights. Hido photographed from the seat of his car. Pulling over and stopping became a compositional choice, and not leaving the vehicle has all manner of aesthetic consequences. Cut off from the full sensorial experience, Hido must relate to his surrounding as pure image, mediated by the car's windows. On cold days, the car is warm, and Hido's breath condenses on the glass to leave shifting and translucent patches that diffuse the view and remind us of the photographer's embodied presence in this world.

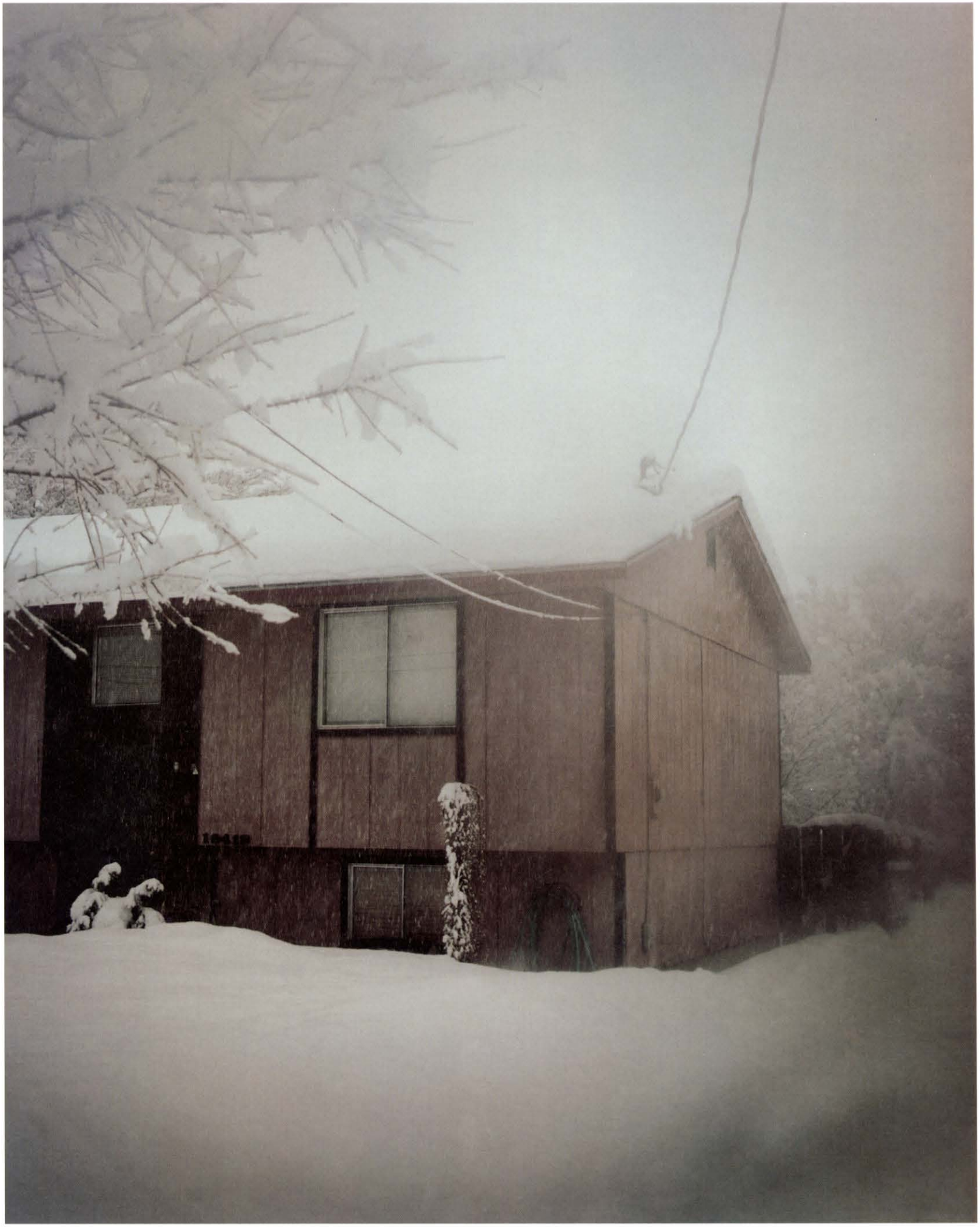
In American cinema and literature the open road has many guises, but in general they group around the heroic and emancipatory, or the lonely and anxious. The road is a space of escape and apprehension, each defining the other. Hido accepts all this, knowing that his purposefully emptied pictures will be filled by the viewer with a range of conflicting emotional responses. Moreover, these responses are bound to derive as much from past images as direct experience. This might account for the uncanny aspect of these pictures. Hido seems to offer them up as memory triggers, open pictorial spaces into which we may project.

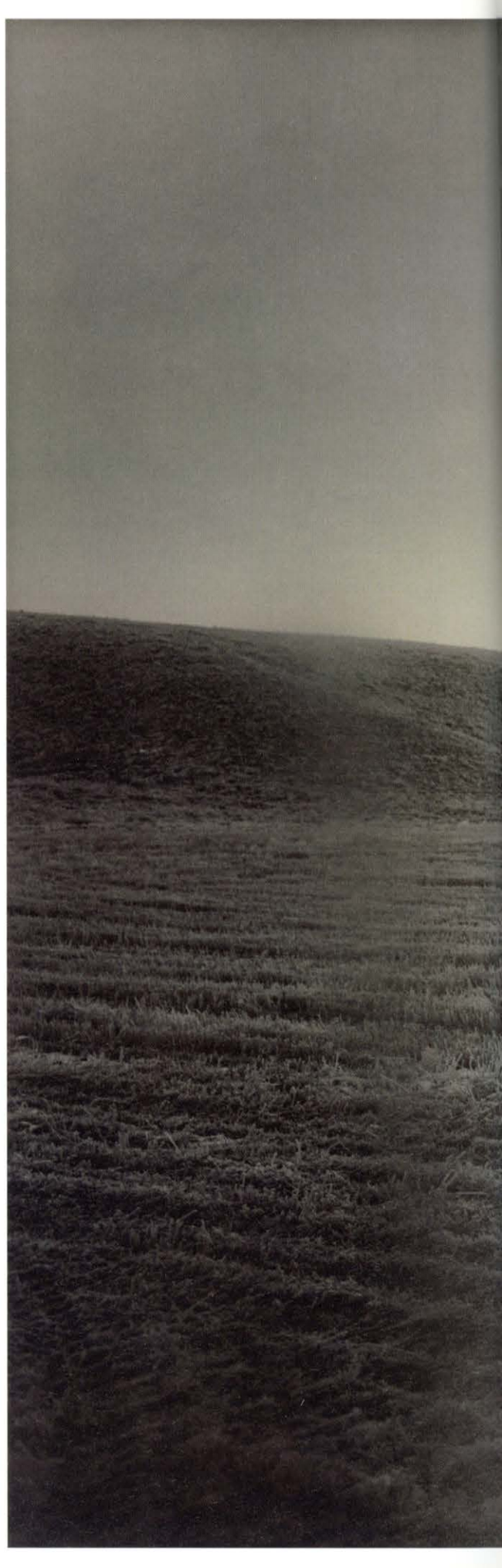
Driving for hours through these anywhere-nowhere landscapes, Hido hoped for the rare epiphany when light and point of view come together to make visible the common poetry of fleeting transcendence. And there's no knowing where, when, or if it is going to happen. There are no "events" to speak of here beyond the capture of ephemeral atmosphere.

Hido belongs to a particular lineage of American photographers that understands color printing as realistic and descriptive yet also highly synthetic, even artificial. He shoots medium format and made these prints himself in the darkroom, interpreting the negative in expressive ways. "I photograph like a documentarian, but I print like a painter," he has said.

TODD HIDO, #6415, 2007

TODD HIDO, *#8611*, 2009





TODD HIDO, *#5105*, 2006

TODD HIDO, #6097, 2007

TODD HIDO, *#3114-B*, 2002

TODD HIDO, *#9308*, 2010

TODD HIDO, *#7915*, 2008

RYAN MCGINLEY

The Journey Is the Destination

2004 – 2014

"I have absolutely no interest in creating depressing images." — Ryan McGinley

In 2003, at the age of twenty-five, Ryan McGinley was given a solo show at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art and was swiftly heralded as a spokesman for a generation. Perhaps not an *entire* generation, but at least those parts of it to be found in the affluent quarters of postindustrial American cities. Later that year, a collector loaned McGinley a country house in Vermont. Friends and acquaintances were invited up from New York each week. McGinley would initiate scenarios in which the visitors would improvise while he photographed.

In 2004, he began a series of annual road trips with a similar premise. Now the young people were to be recruited from art schools and cities worldwide. Each trip generated a new body of work, including *Sun and Health* (2006), *I Know Where the Summer Goes* (2008), and *Moonmilk* (2009). The pictures mixed the look of '70s soft porn, nudism, holiday snapshots, and sports photography. McGinley is a compulsive note-taker, and the pictures are partly preconceived. With his characteristically loose directorial hand, the results come close to performance art or a fashion shoot.

Less than half a decade on, McGinley's early work has already become a document of a particular moment, not just of his artistic life, but of that first generation who never knew a world without mobile phone cameras or social media. They were all unsuspecting pioneers of a kind, the first obliged to grow up feeling that to be and to photograph, or *be* photographed, might be almost interchangeable. Images become tokens among circles of intensely image-conscious friends, and the idea of "documentary" cannot be separated from the theater of acting out.

Where exactly are these photographs taken? It hardly matters. It's all there to signify "nature." McGinley's posse takes to the open road not to look for America, but to run away from it temporarily. The pictures may seem free of angst, commentary, or even concern, as if this was a group with all it needed and nothing much to do. However, these fragile adventures are often just as escapist for the participants as for McGinley's metropolitan audience. It is a world in which the young are not lumbered with the harsh reality of debts, high rents, or a precarious future in an unstable economy. Running wild and enjoying youth for youth's sake might be easier to imagine than an alternative future. Is there something or someone just beyond the frame waiting to end it all? Actually, yes: McGinley regularly hires lookouts with walkie-talkies to ensure nothing interrupts the frolics.

Many commentators have likened McGinley's work to the diaristic photography of Nan Goldin and Larry Clark. While his images lack their pain and hardship, Hollywood has taught us that any scene of youthful, bucolic bliss tends to presage something ominous. Likewise, any art that is so relentlessly upbeat inevitably has the inverse effect. Beauty slips into "beauty," fun into "fun," nudity into "nudity." Whatever the unspoken cause, it seems to haunt McGinley's photographs. Sometimes it's the vague melancholy of perfect summers past, but there is looming unrest as well. Its absence from the frame only serves to amplify it.

RYAN MCGINLEY, *MELLOW MEADOW*, 2012

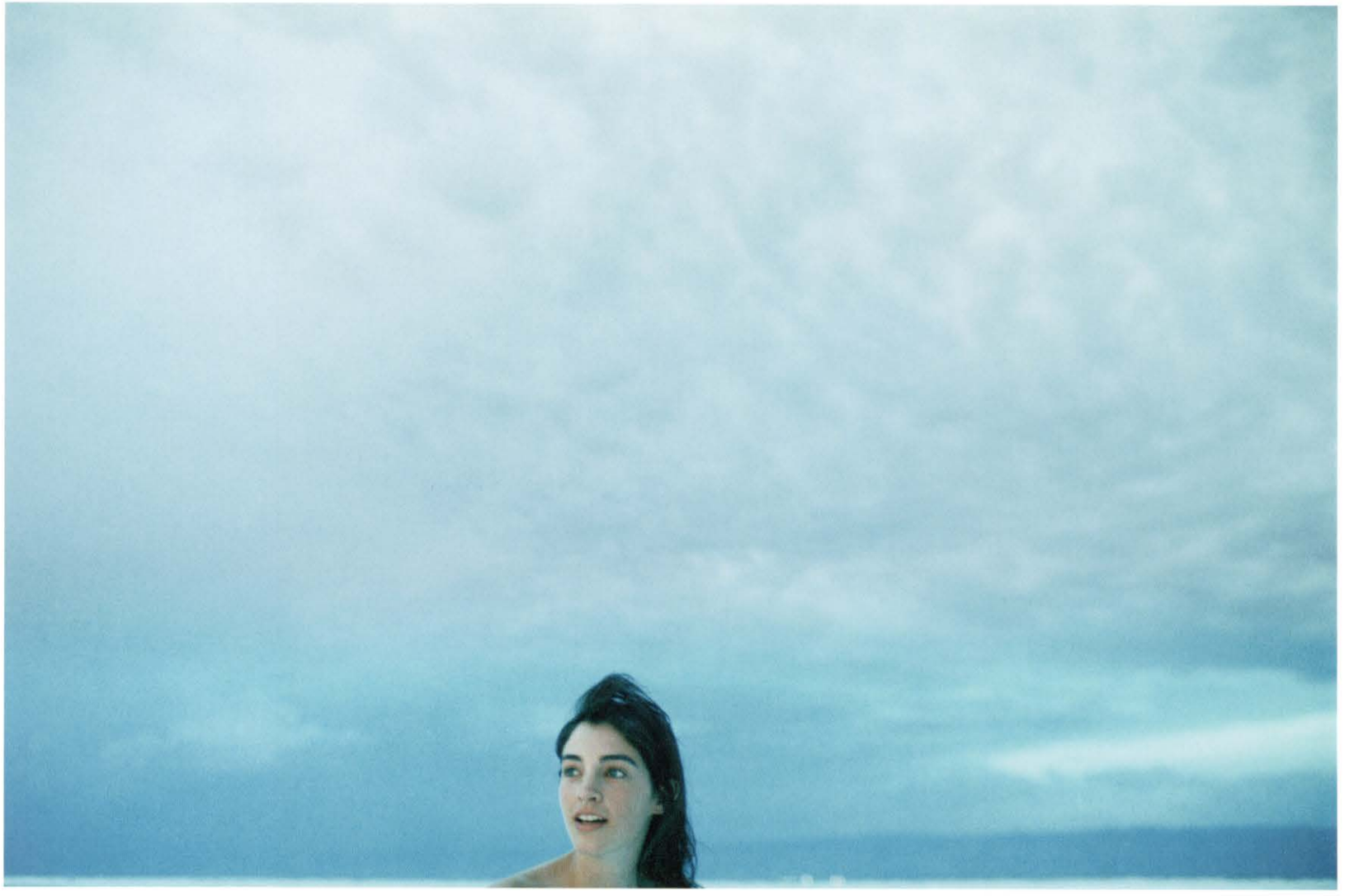
RYAN MCGINLEY,
(OPPOSITE) *KISS EXPLOSION*, 2005
(ABOVE) *DAKOTA HAIR*, 2004

RYAN MCGINLEY,
UNTITLED (NUDES, VAN, HORSE), 2005

RYAN MCGINLEY,
JONAS (GLOW FALLS), 2008

RYAN MCGINLEY,
NICK (BLOOD FALLS), 2008

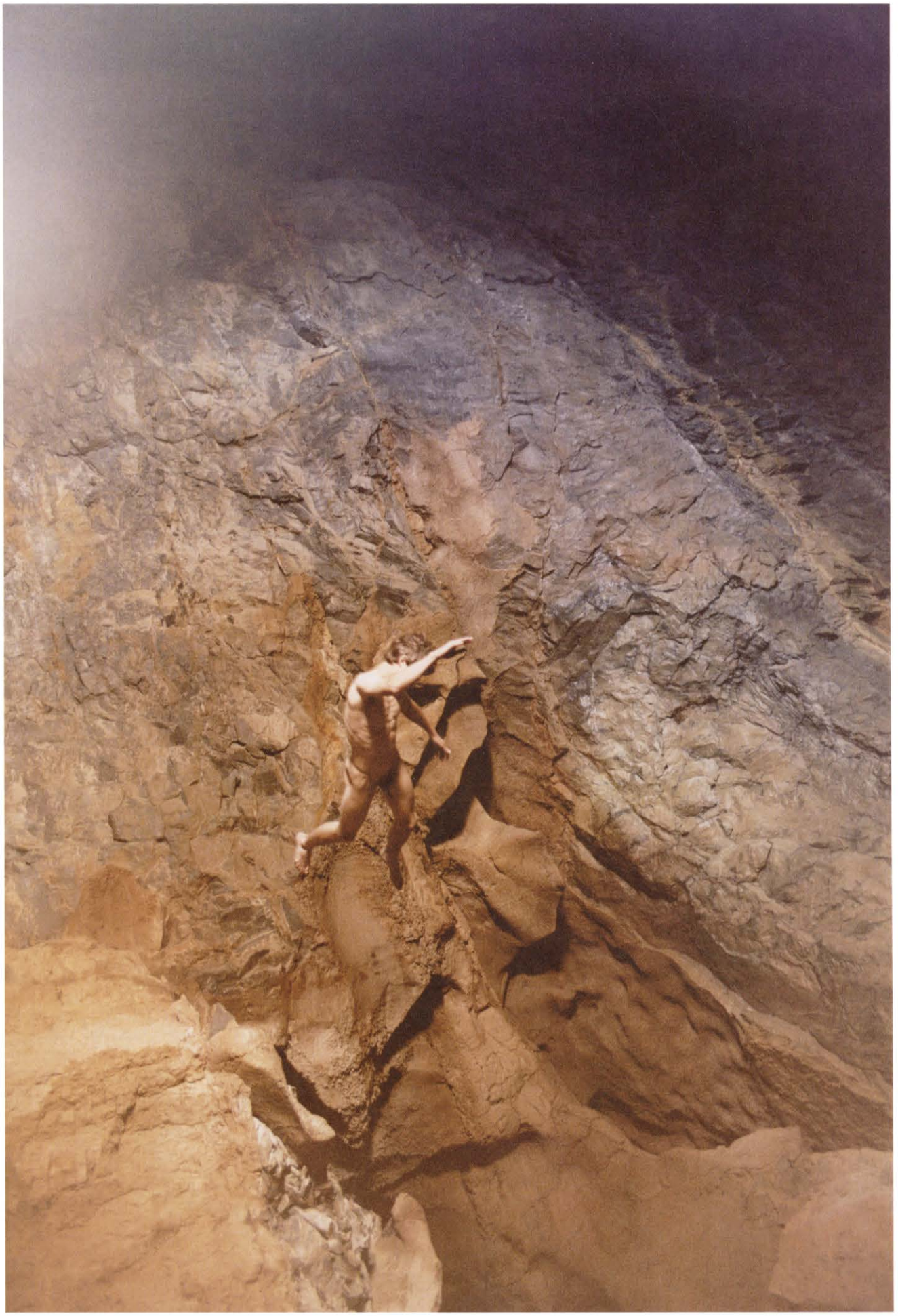
RYAN MCGINLEY, *FALLING (SAND)*, 2007



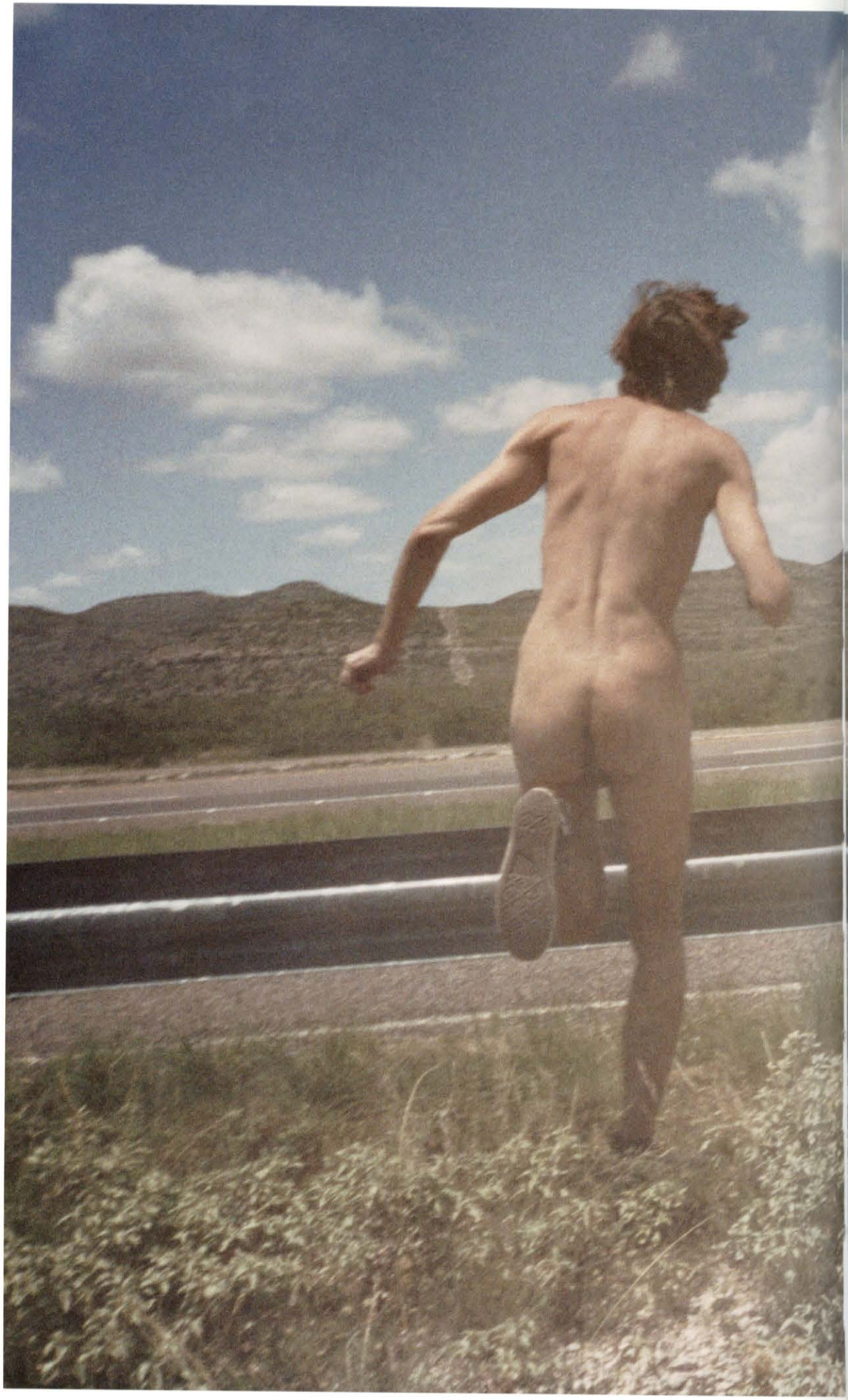
RYAN MCGINLEY, *LAURA (THUNDERSTORM)*, 2007

RYAN MCGINLEY,
(OPPOSITE) *GENIE*, 2014
(ABOVE) *SUSANNAH (FOXTAIL BARLEY)*, 2014

RYAN MCGINLEY,
BRANDEE (MIDNIGHT FLIGHT), 2011



RYAN MCGINLEY,
WES (FALLING), 2009



RYAN MCGINLEY, *HIGHWAY*, 2007

JUSTINE KURLAND

Highway Kinel

2007 – 2014

Justine Kurland came to prominence in the early 2000s with a series of photographs of adolescent girls running away from home, taking their chances on the road. They were staged, dreamlike, and highly cinematic scenes. Around the time her son Casper was born, her photography became much more reactive and less planned. She rediscovered the continued relevance of a more straightforward engagement with the observable world. What remained was a deep interest in the road, escape, and ways of living beyond mainstream values.

Kurland began to take extended road trips with Casper—her life as an artist and mother balanced finely between the need for routine and the desire for freedom and surprise. "With a child, you're getting your heart broken every second. Everything becomes dramatic. Everything becomes heightened, and the range of experience becomes so much greater. Your heart is so much more open. All of those things that we think of when we think about the artist's experience are embodied in this idea of having children. But still, it has historically been a woman's experience."

Mother and son would travel in their customized van, going south in the winter and north in the summer. As well as photographing people encountered in passing, Kurland would revisit friends and acquaintances living on the edges of society or close to subsistence levels. "How to photograph such lives is a tricky question," she admits. "There's such a mythology around life on the margins. It goes back to John Steinbeck's writing and beyond." That mythology, coupled with ethical difficulties of depicting the lives of others has put off many contemporary writers and photographers, resulting in further invisibility. "I believe it's where the social fabric begins to unravel that we can learn about society. I love that part of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* where James Agee asks, 'Who am I to be writing about the lives of these struggling tenant farmers?' but then asks, 'and who are you to be reading these words?' For all the criticisms made of documentary practice I still come back to it."

Kurland does not profess to have answered these difficult questions, but the bold openness, intimacy, and generosity of her pictures is a starting point. When Casper began kindergarten, he could only come on the summer trips. Aged three, he became obsessed with trains (toys and real ones), and Kurland responded to this with her camera, making highly symbolic pictures of trains moving across epic landscapes. And then the approach changed again, looking less to idealism than to a realistic encounter with the pragmatic but beautiful facts of daily life. Recent pictures trade the deep mythology of the railroad for the mythology of the car that replaced it.

JUSTINE KURLAND, *PLAYING WITH TRAINS WHILE WAITING FOR TRAINS*, 2008

JUSTINE KURLAND,
SPARE SOME GAS, 2010

JUSTINE KURLAND,
SUITCASE UNDER PALO VERDE, 2012

JUSTINE KURLAND,
PACKING GOATS IN THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS, 2011

JUSTINE KURLAND,
FORT, PARTIALLY BUILT, 2011

JUSTINE KURLAND,
FORD MUSTANG FASTBACK, UPPER 9TH WARD, 2012

JUSTINE KURLAND,
WATERMELON STILL LIFE, 2012

JUSTINE KURLAND,
NEW FAMILY, BLACK BEAR RANCH, 2011

JUSTINE KURLAND, *AFTER WESTON*, 2011

JUSTINE KURLAND,
GIRL TENDING FIRE, CLAM BEACH COUNTY CAMPGROUND, 2012

JUSTINE KURLAND, *CLAIRE, 8TH WARD*, 2012

JUSTINE KURLAND, *CAMPGROUND, WHISKEYTOWN*, 2008

JUSTINE KURLAND, *HUMMING BIRD*, 2010

NICO KREBS

The Great Unreal

2005 – 2008

What happens if you take every hardened cliché of the open road, every familiar motif, every worn out truism, then shuffle them, put them in a blender, pour them out on a table, and rearrange them into something new? When the young Swiss duo Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs (also known as TONK) published *The Great Unreal* in 2009, nobody saw it coming, but it was welcomed with excitement, confusion, and a sense that, well, *somebody* had to do it.

True to their deconstructionist spirit, Onorato and Krebs are as interested in mystery and enigma as they are in revealing the mechanisms of our culture. The road trip is taken apart in the hope that it might lead to some undefined, but much needed imaginative space. They take to the road while taking their own road with them. The series is peppered with strips of toy highway. It cuts through mountains made of bedclothes, circles around in the middle of nowhere, and perches on a stand in a comically gauche trompe l'oeil. Even the "real" roads seem to fail, obscured by haze or succumbing to landslides.

Pictured almost devoid of people, or even towns, this America is an existential playground. Sometimes it is slapstick, but mostly it's a little unnerving. If there is a frontier here, it might be the one between reality and fiction. Or is it between entropy and action? Or between space and image? Or perhaps between the world out there and the mental world in here? Even the motel interiors become exteriors.

There is no narrative, no explicit commentary, and no unifying style. All you have to go on are the diverse images, but since the road remains such a strong central motif, it's enough to at least suggest some kind of continuity. Fittingly, the book of the project offers just one mischievous sentence: "All images were made in the United States of America between 2005 and 2008, photographed on Negative Film Material without the use of digital manipulation." Can this really be a purist commitment to analogue photography? What are all those blotches and mists? And what should we make of that title, *The Great Unreal*? Some of the prints were added to and then rephotographed, and elsewhere there seem to be signs of digital postproduction.

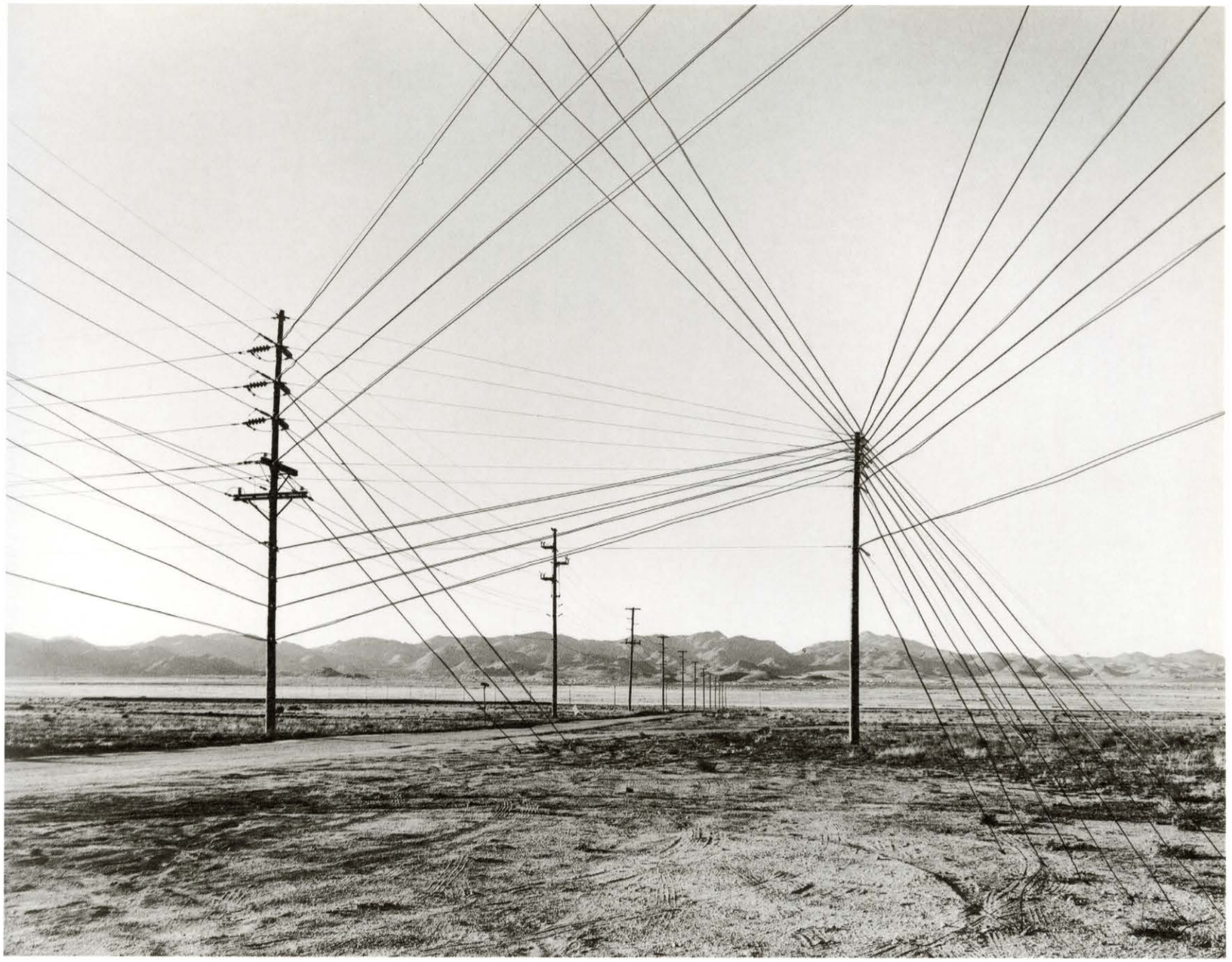
And yet, despite all the game playing, label dodging, and anarchic fun *The Great Unreal* is clearly very much in love with American photography and the open road. Both are inexhaustible. Just when we think we know what they are, they morph into something else.

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
HAPPY ENDING, 2006

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
LEADVILLE 1, 2008

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
MAP, 2005

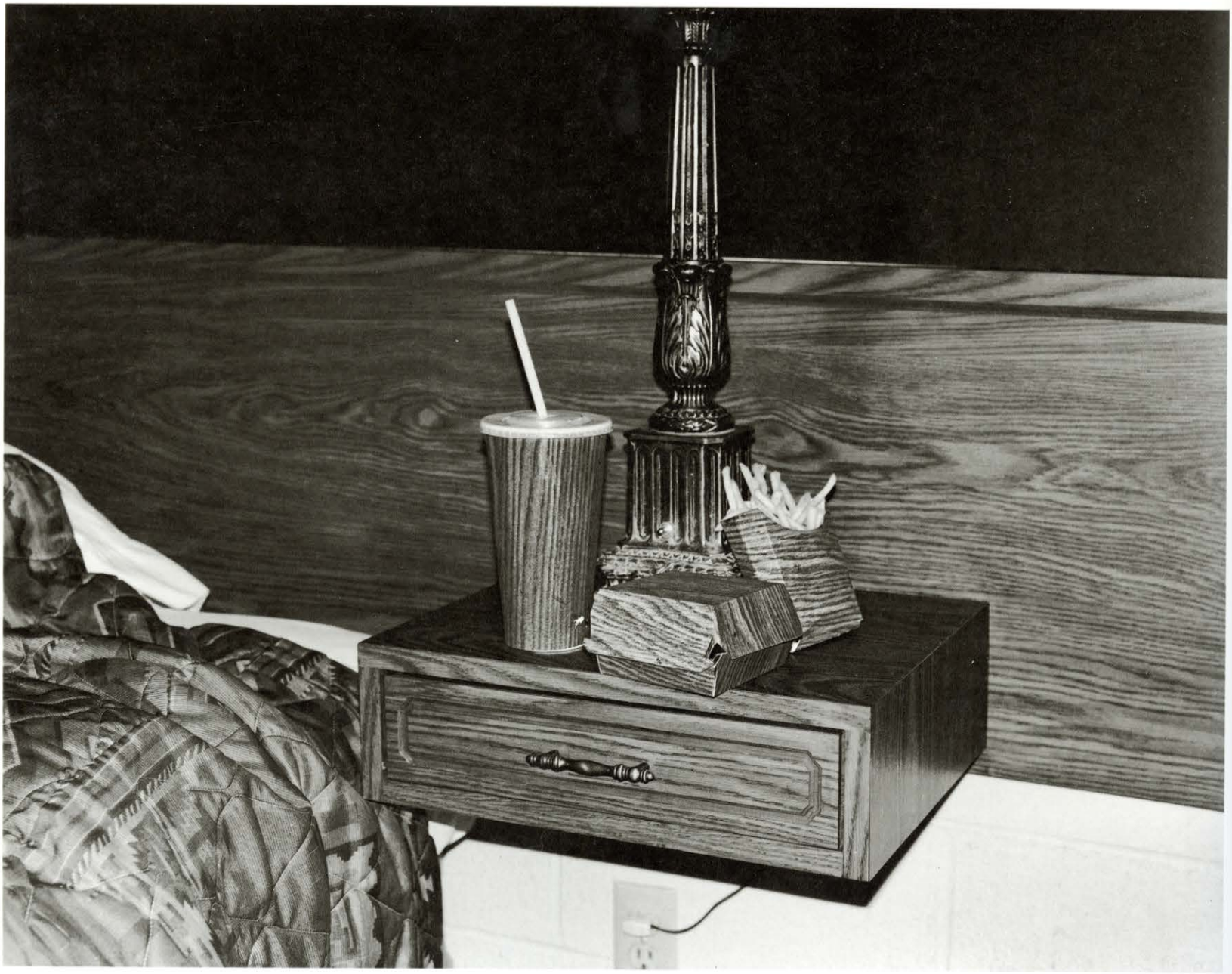
TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
ROOF, 2008



TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
WIRES, 2008

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
KNIGHTS INN, 2006

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
KNIGHTS OUT, 2006



TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
VALUE MEAL, 2006

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
TIRES, 2006

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
POMMES FRITTES, 2005

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
BED STREET, 2006

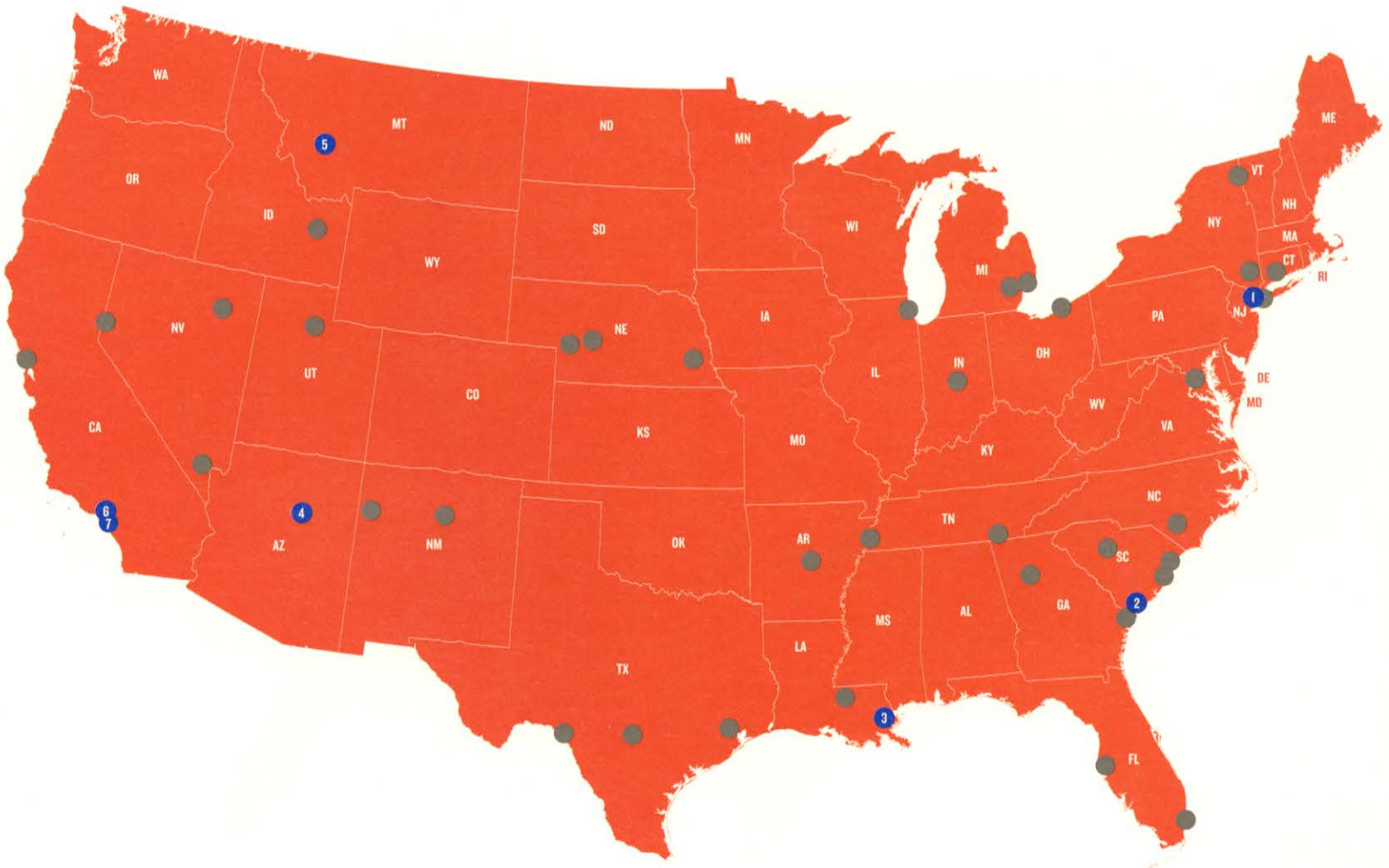
TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
BROKEN STREET LINE, 2008

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
CAR 2, 2008

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS,
RED GLOW, 2006

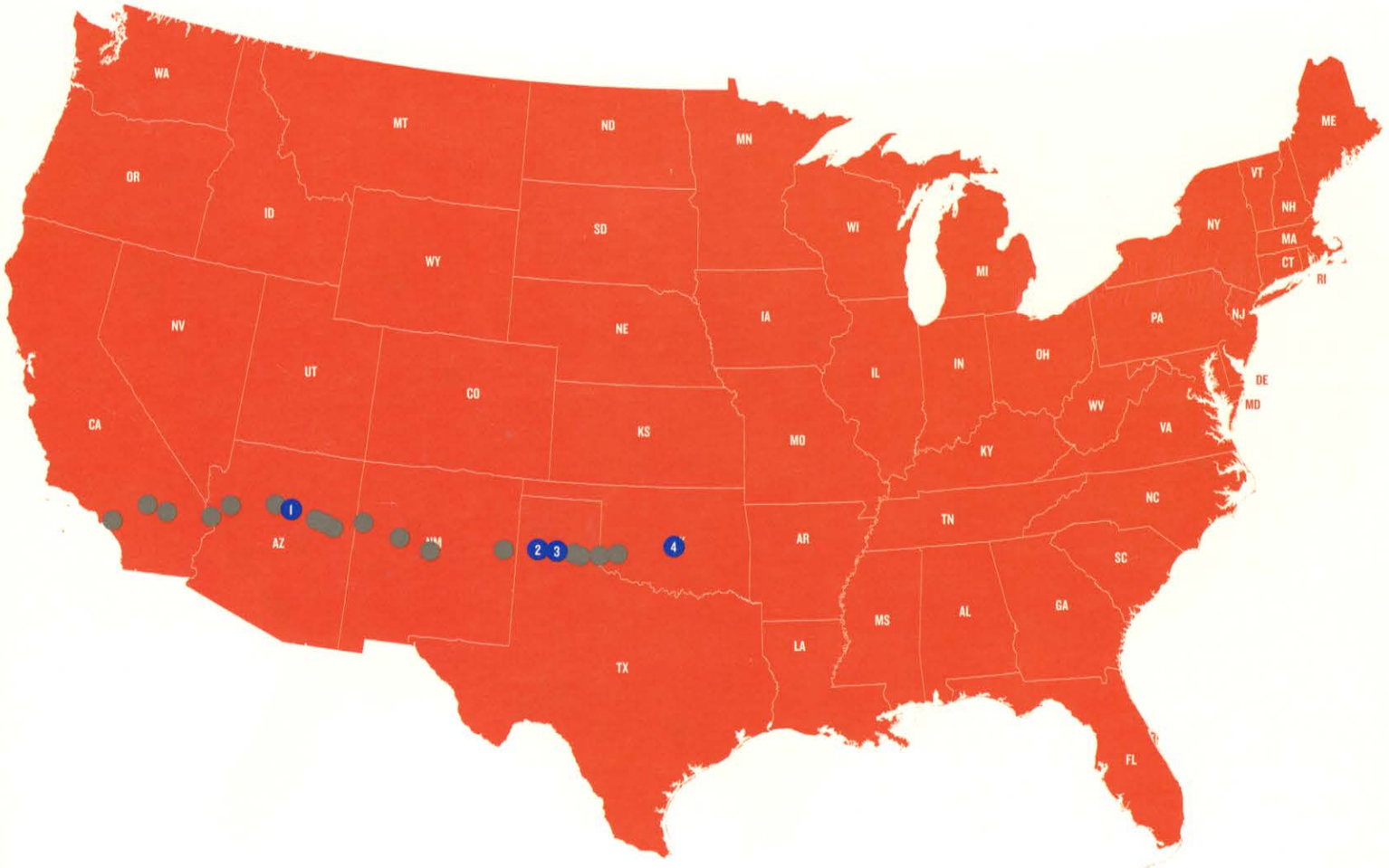
These maps represent the approximate locations in the continental United States (when known) of published pictures from each photographer's body of work. Locations that appear in *The Open Road* are numbered with a blue dot; each page number is indicated in the legend. Other locations photographed by the artist are indicated with a gray dot.

ROBERT FRANK



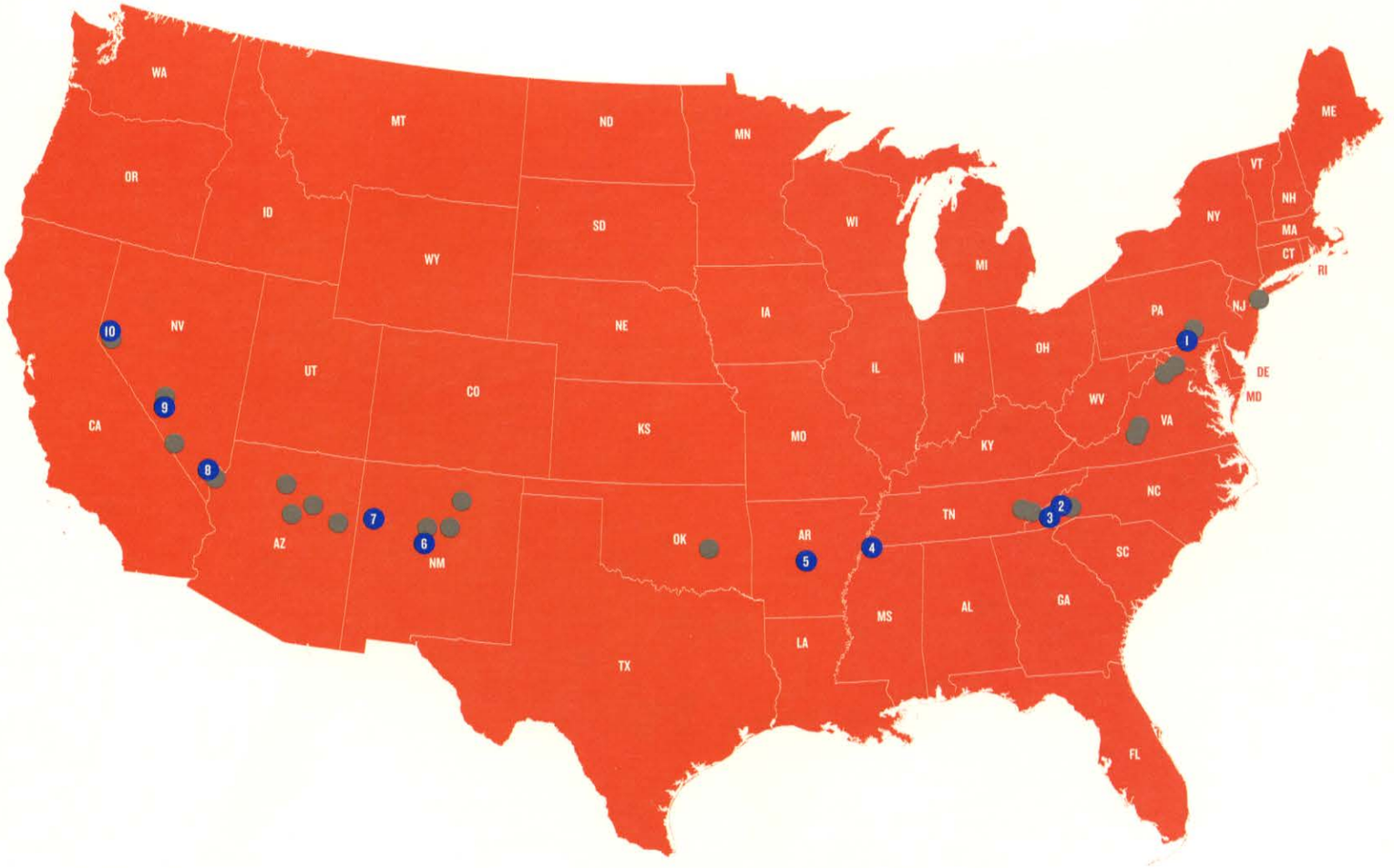
1 HOBOKEN, NJ 45
2 BEAUFORT, SC 51
3 NEW ORLEANS, LA 43, 44
4 NEAR FLAGSTAFF, AZ 49
5 BUTTE, MT 48
6 HOLLYWOOD, CA 47
7 LONG BEACH, CA 26

ED RUSCHA



1 FLAGSTAFF, AZ 55
2 VEGA, TX 58
3 AMARILLO, TX 59
4 OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 56

INGE MORATH



1 GETTYSBURG, PA 66
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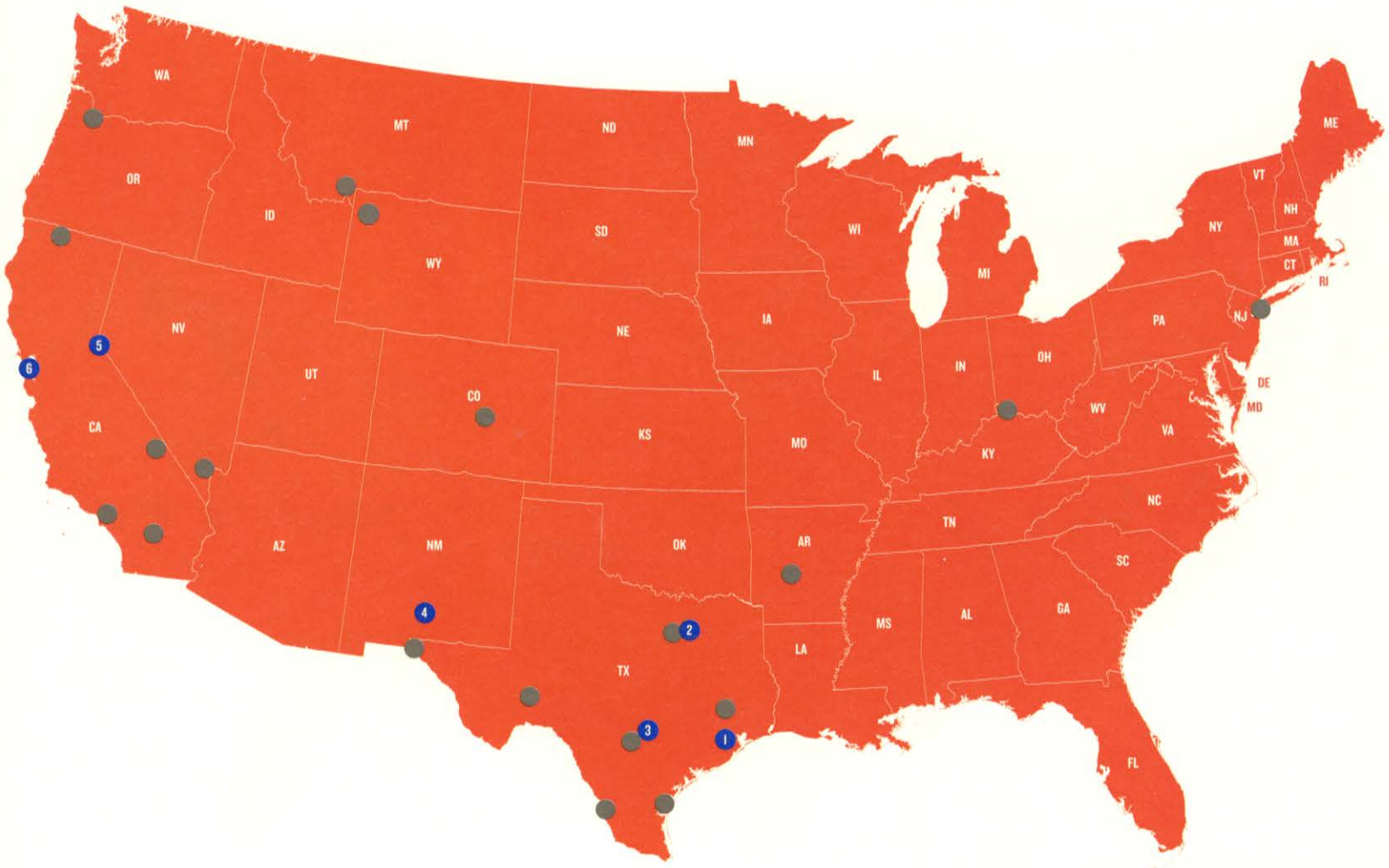
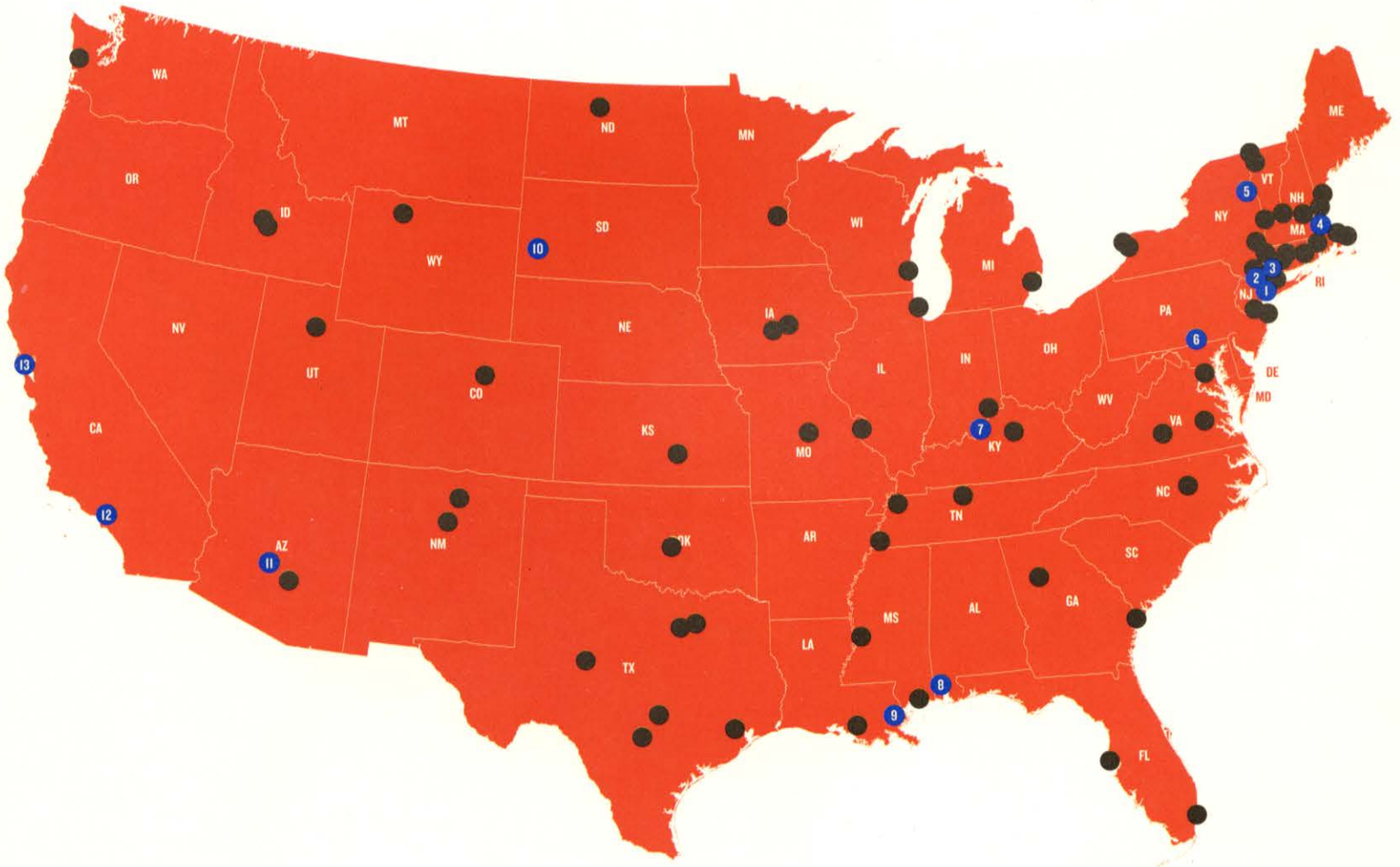
3 CHEROKEE VILLAGE, NC 67, 69, 70
4 MEMPHIS, TN 65
5 LITTLE ROCK, AR 75
6 ALBUQUERQUE, NM 71, 72
7 NEAR GALLUP, NM 74
8 LAS VEGAS, NV 77
9 GOLDFIELD, NV 78
10 RENO, NV 63, 76

GARRY WINOGRAND



1 HOUSTON, TX 88, 92
2 DALLAS, TX 87, 89, 90
3 SAN MARCOS, TX 85
4 WHITE SANDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, NM 83, 84
5 LAKE TAHOE, CA 93
6 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 91

LEE FRIEDLANDER



1 NEW YORK, NY 125
2 YONKERS, NY 128
3 STAMFORD, CT 30
4 BOSTON, MA 123
5 TICONDEROGA, NY 119
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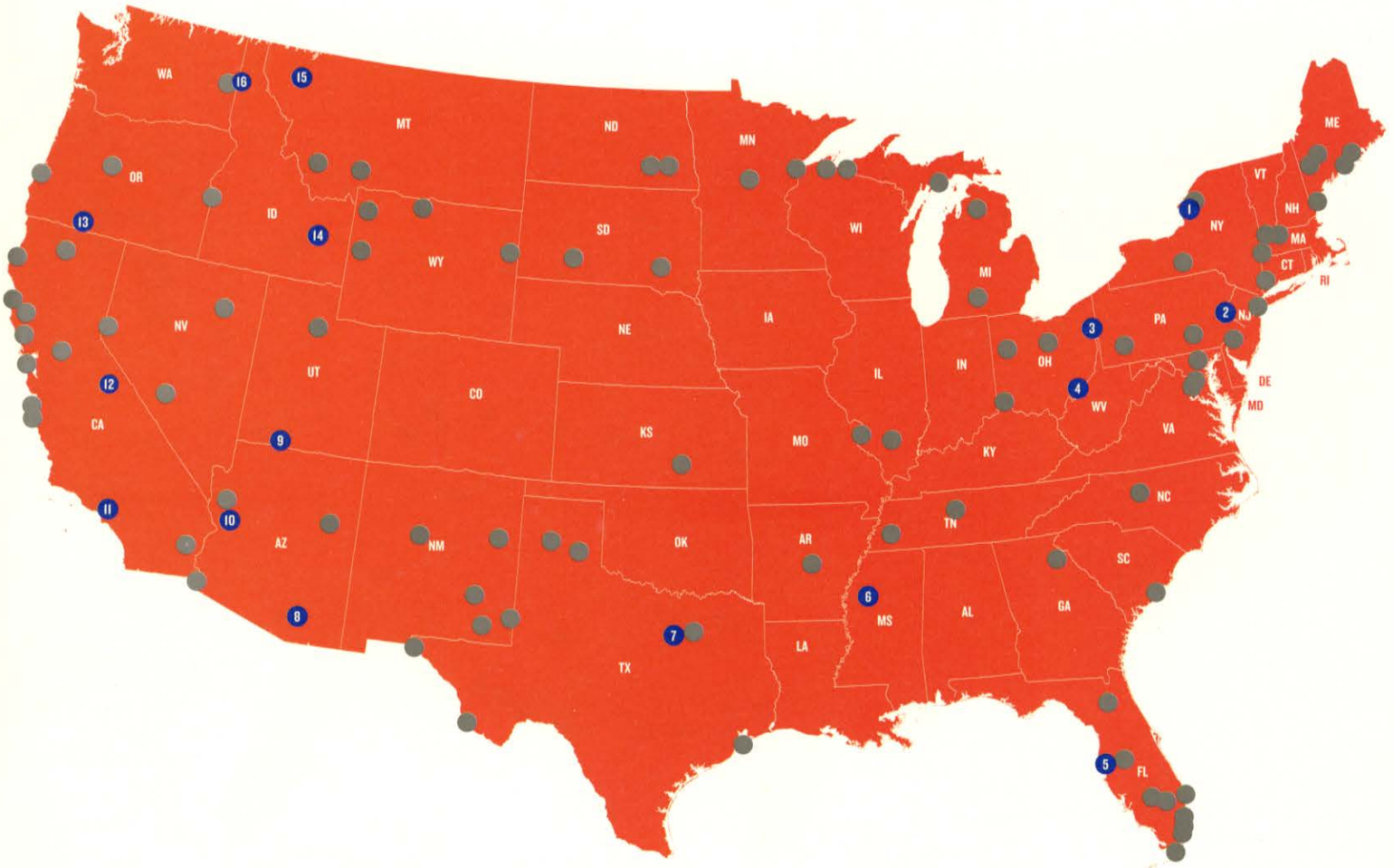
7 LOUISVILLE, KY 121
8 MOBILE, AL 126
9 NEW ORLEANS, LA 129
10 MOUNT RUSHMORE, SD 117
11 PHOENIX, AZ 122
12 LOS ANGELES, CA 124
13 SAN FRANCISCO, CA 127

STEPHEN SHORE



1 WATERTOWN, NY 178
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7 FORT WORTH, TX 184
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13 KLAMATH FALLS, OR 171
14 IDAHO FALLS, ID 172
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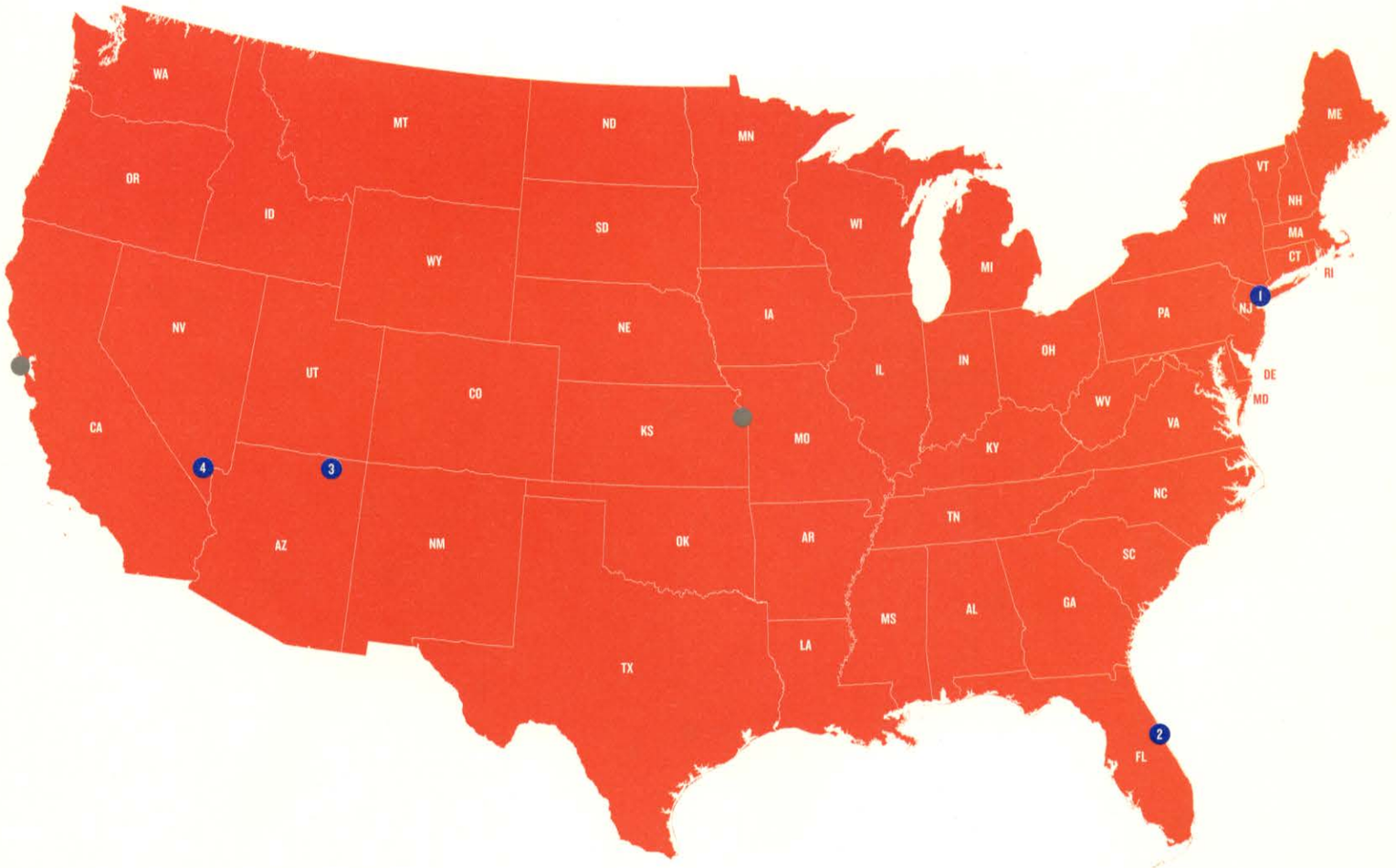
16 POST FALLS, ID 177

VICTOR BURGIN



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2 CAPE CANAVERAL, FL 212
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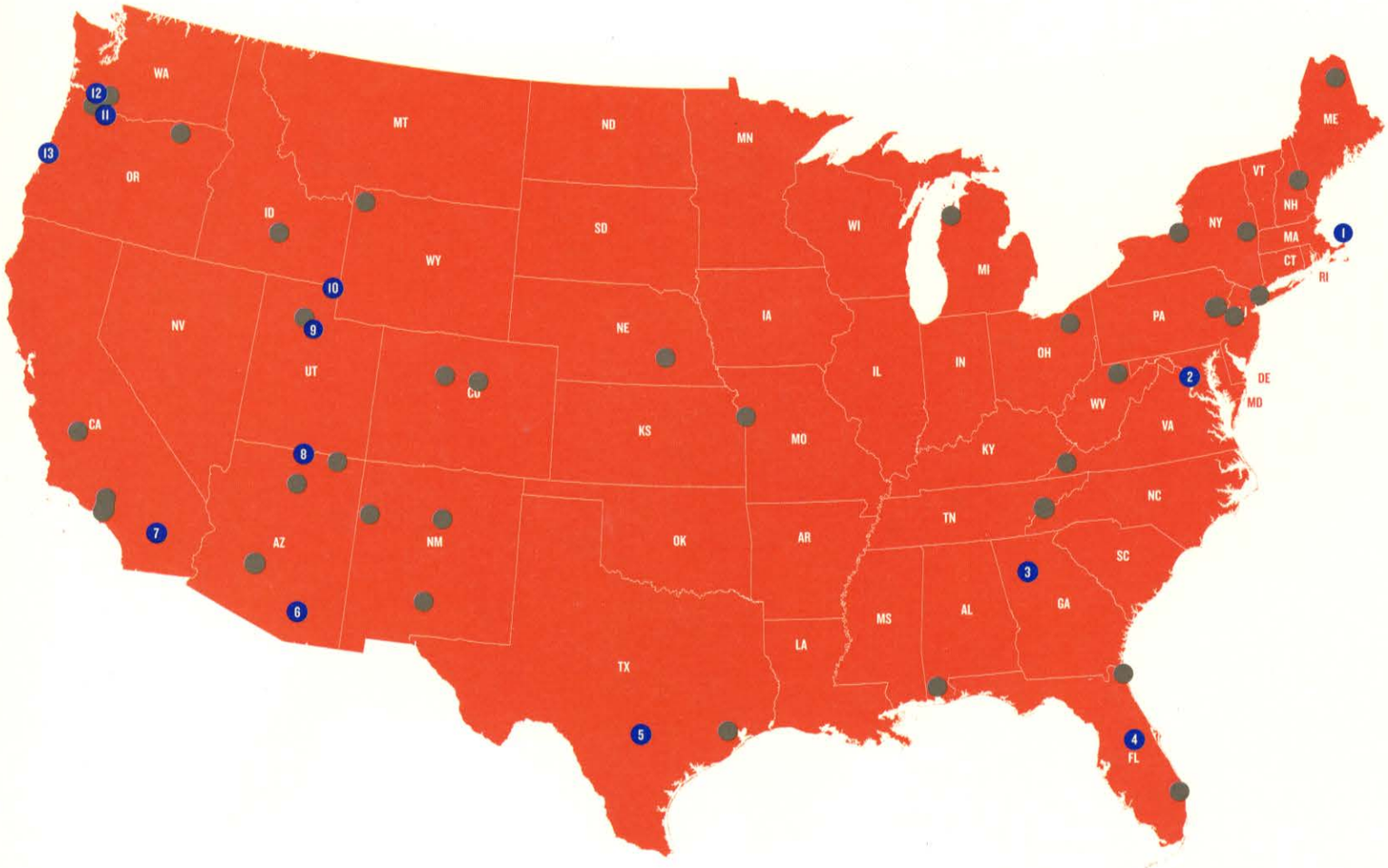
4 LAS VEGAS, NV 214

JOEL STERNFELD



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9 PARK CITY, UT 226
10 BEAR LAKE, UT 232
11 GRESHAM, OR 225
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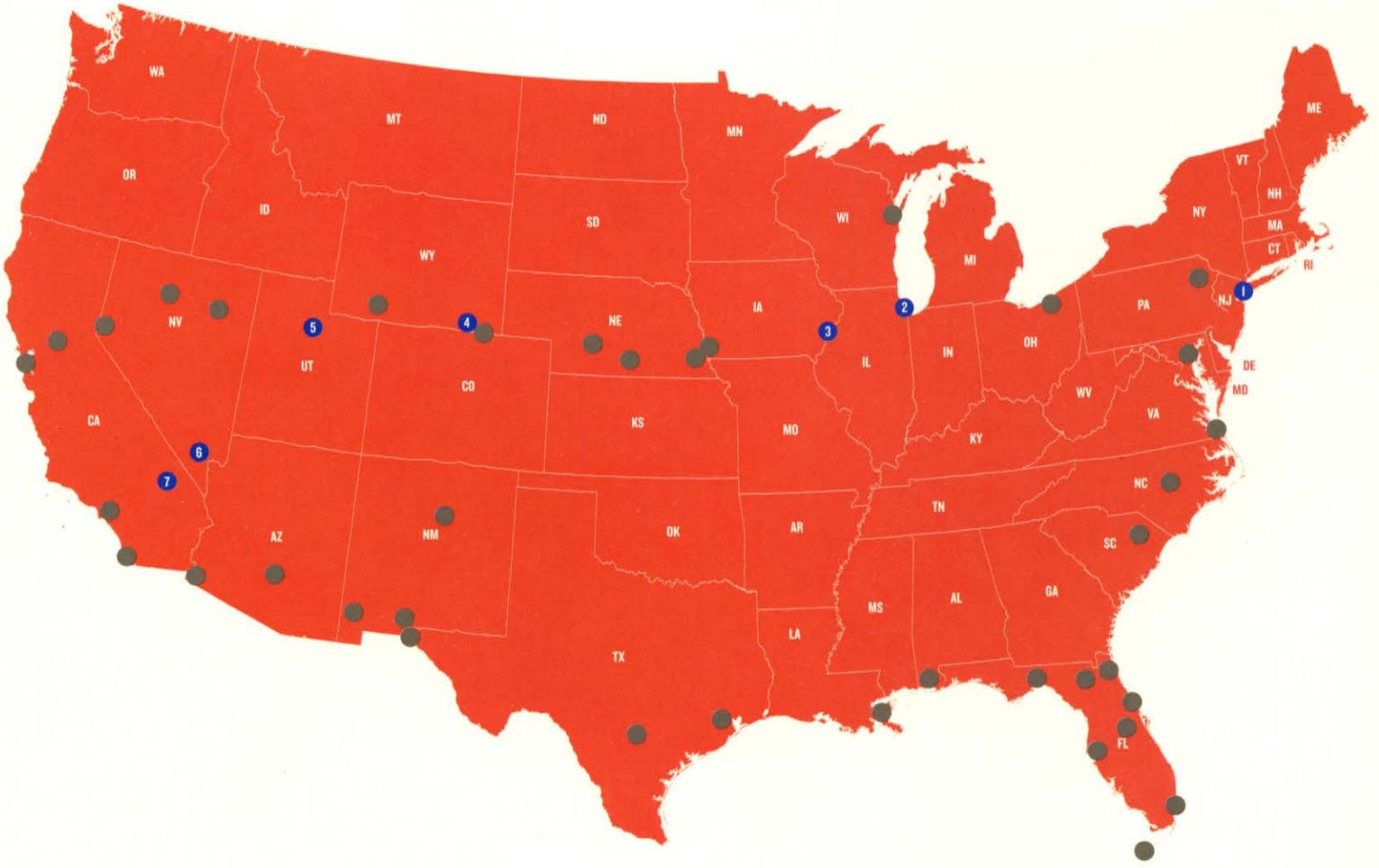
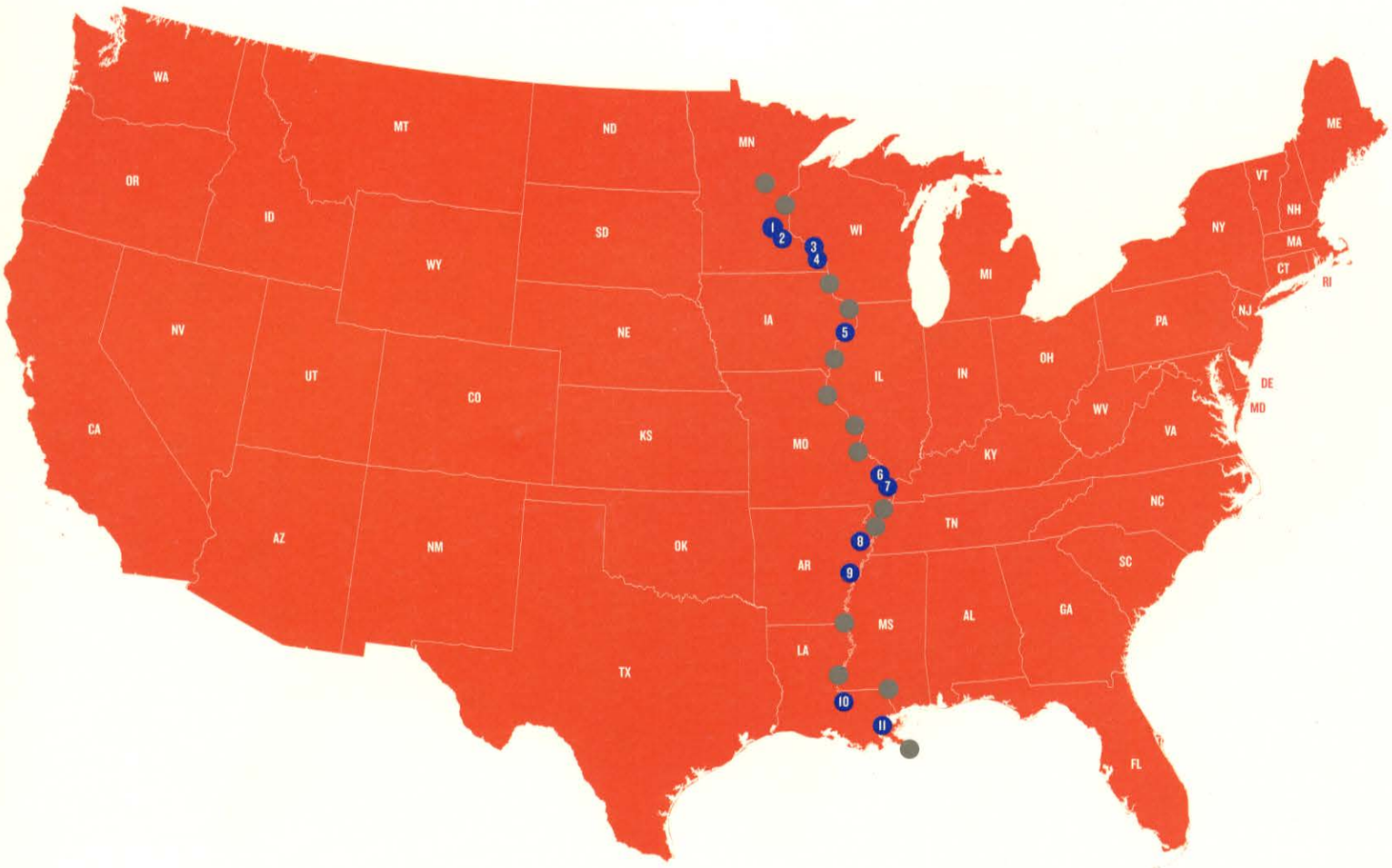
13 FLORENCE, OR 237

SHINYA FUJIWARA



1 NEW YORK, NY 243
2 CHICAGO, IL 247
3 NEAR DAVENPORT, IA 249
4 LARAMIE, WY 245
5 NEAR SALT LAKE CITY, UT 242, 244
6 LAS VEGAS, NV 246
7 MOJAVE DESERT, CA 241, 248

ALEC SOTH



1 VASA, MN 264
2 MINNEAPOLIS, MN 258
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5 DAVENPORT, IA 259
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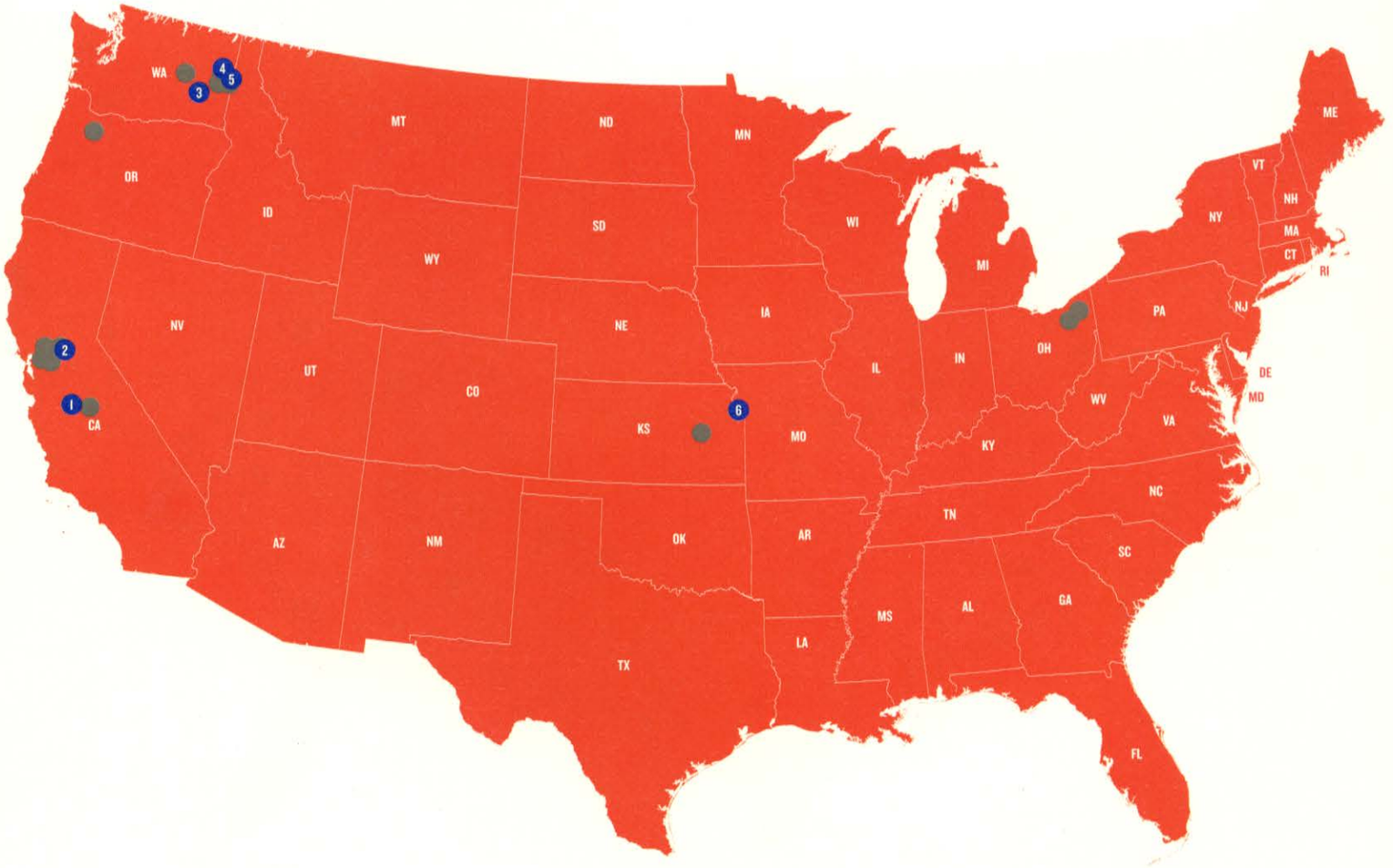
7 WICKLIFFE, KY 262
8 DYESS, AR 254
9 HELENA, AR 261
10 BATON ROUGE, LA 253
11 NEW ORLEANS, LA 255, 257

TODD HIDO



1 MENDOTA, CA 281
2 RIO VISTA, CA 271, 279
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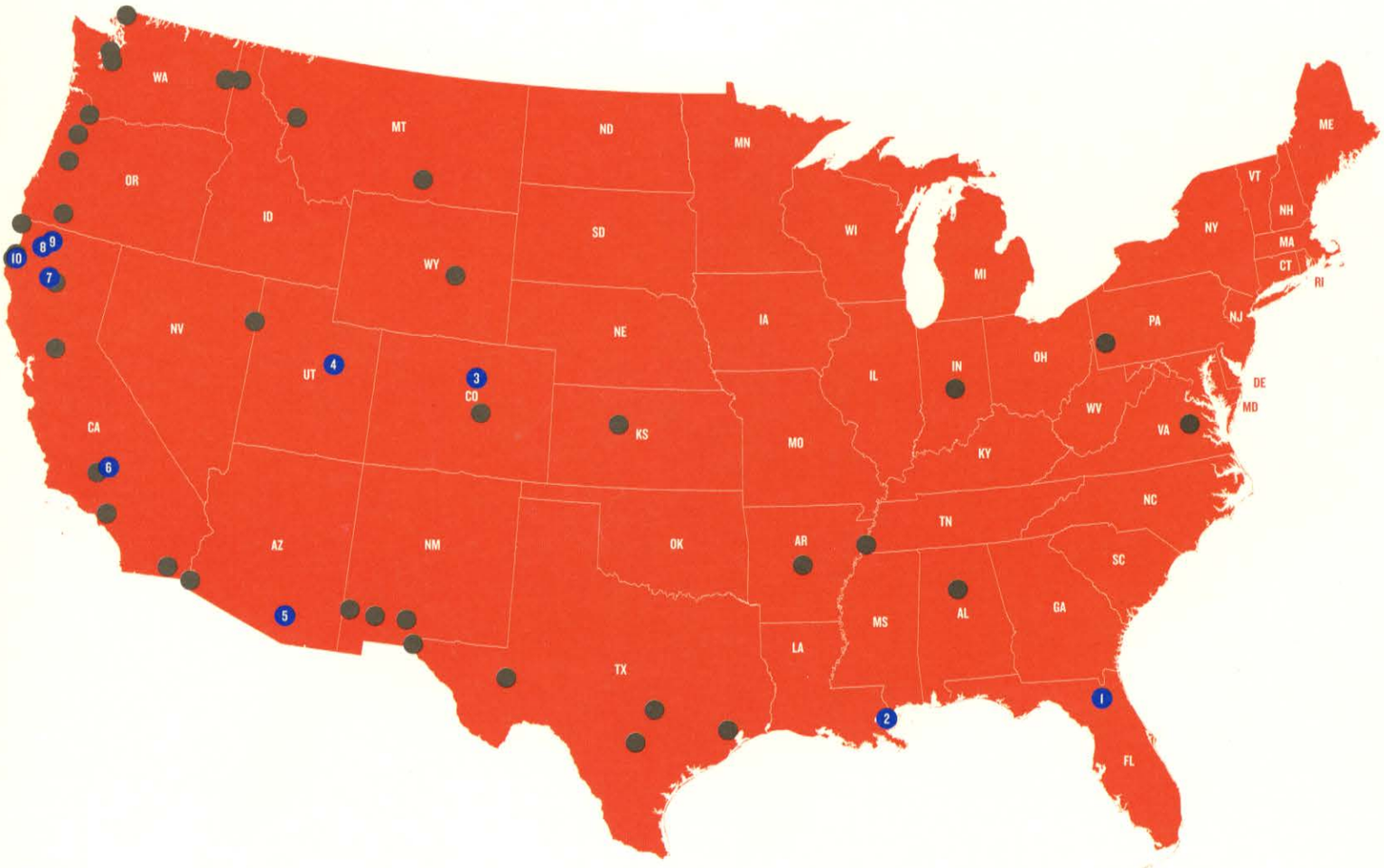
JUSTINE KURLAND



1	WALDO, FL	307
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8	FORKS OF SALMON, CA	311, 313
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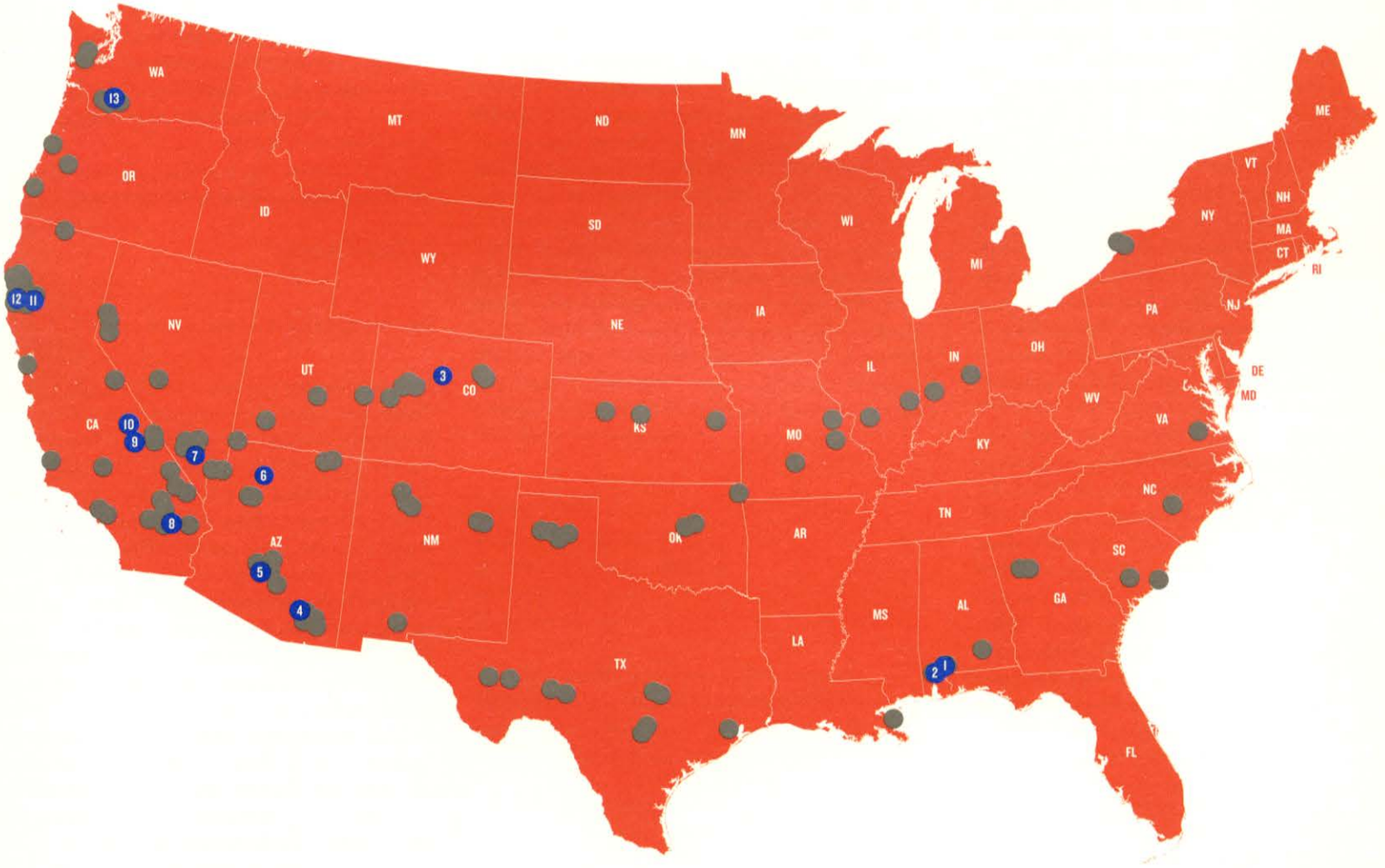
10	ARCATA, CA	314

TAIYO ONORATO & NICO KREBS



1 STOCKTON, AL 326
2 CREOLA, AL 327
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6 GRAND CANYON, AZ 330
7 LAS VEGAS, NV 329
8 RICE, CA 321
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10 LONE PINE, CA 325
11 LAYTONVILLE, CA 331
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For Echo and Vita, always up for adventure.

— David Campany

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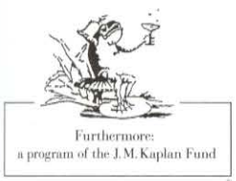

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